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A STUDY OF  
HART CRANE'S SYMBOLISM  
in  
WHITE BUILDINGS and THE BRIDGE

by

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Presented in partial fulfillment of the  
requirement for the degree of  
Master of Arts

Montana State University

1948

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: HART CRANE AND THE SYMBOLISTS

It is too often assumed either that Hart Crane's poems can be understood or felt by the average reader without much outside explanation, or that they are so completely steeped in mysticism, so deeply personal, or so lacking in syntactical connection and logic, that they are completely esoteric. Neither assumption is wholly correct. Although Crane recognized early in his career that his poems would find a limited audience, the steadily increasing number of his readers indicates that his poems must contain a certain degree of universality. The average reader can, through careful and repeated reading and application, find much that is rewarding in Crane's poetry. However, in order to reach fuller understanding and enjoyment of Crane's poems, it would be very helpful for the average reader to know some of the theories which Crane held concerning poetry, and some of the influences under which he came in the course of his writing, and which were responsible to a certain extent for making his poems what they are.

Certainly not the least of the influences under which Crane fell at the time when he was groping about for what he thought should be his own manner of poetic expression was that of the French Symbolist movement, whose chief exponents were

Rimbaud, Mallarmé, and LaForgue. Briefly, the Symbolists "had chosen the communication of complex emotional states by means of indirect devices including symbols, compressed metaphors, and subtle music which suggested rather than stated or described."<sup>1</sup> The influence of this movement upon Crane's poetry was probably greater than that of any other single poet or group of poets.<sup>2</sup>

It is the purpose of this study, first, to attempt an analysis of some of Crane's poetry through a discussion of the symbols which he uses in White Buildings, and certain of the ideas which they represent; and second, to show the way to a fuller understanding of the symbolism of The Bridge in light of the symbolism in the earlier poems. It is understood, of course, that any such analysis cannot be completely conclusive, since, with any poetry which employs other than the most obvious symbols, there remains always a margin of doubtfulness. Readers of different temperament and background may

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1. Brom Weber, Hart Crane; A Biographical and Critical Study, p. 38.

2. For biographies of Crane, the reader is urged to see Philip Horton, Hart Crane; The Life of an American Poet, 352 pp., or Weber, op. cit., 452 pp. Good short accounts of Crane's life may be found in George K. Anderson and Eda Lou Walton, editors, This Generation; A Selection of British and American Literature from 1914 to the Present, with Historical and Critical Essays, pp. 595-984, and F. O. Matthiessen, "Crane, Harold Hart," Dictionary of American Biography, XXI, 206-8.

never absolutely agree on final interpretations, but there will be, after careful reading, a broader area of agreement than may seem probable at first sight. It is hoped that from suggestion of some of the ideas which appear to predominate in Crane's poetry, other readers will be encouraged to go further and deeper in the common effort of understanding Crane's poems.

In beginning such a study, it is necessary, first of all, to review in somewhat more detail the principles of symbolism. A symbol, in its general sense, is a particular object which has become imbued with a special meaning, so that it comes to represent something larger than itself--an abstract idea, a religion, a philosophy. The cross, for instance, has become the symbol of Christianity, and a word is a language-symbol for the object, idea or emotion which it represents.

In the narrower sense of the French Symbolist movement, at the end of the nineteenth century, and the writers who carried on that movement, symbolism came to mean, in poetry, the translation of sense impressions into sound and rhythm in writing. The object of the symbolists was not to sketch in details of an idea, an object, or emotion, but merely to suggest it, by the use of certain key words or symbols--to intimate rather than to declare. As Mallarmé, one of the chief proponents of the Symbolist movement, expressed it:

To name an object is to do away with the three-quarters

of the enjoyment of the poem which is derived from the satisfaction of guessing little by little: to suggest it, to evoke it--that is what charms the imagination.<sup>3</sup>

One of the difficulties attendant upon the reading of Crane's poems, or those of any other writer who makes use of symbols, is that those symbols are chosen by the poet, "arbitrarily," Edmund Wilson says, "to stand for special ideas of his own--they are a sort of disguise for those ideas."<sup>4</sup> However, "arbitrarily" is a rather strong term. As shall be seen in examining some of Crane's specific symbols, there seems to be an assumption among the symbolists that there are certain concepts which sink deep into the consciousness of man, although ostensibly, especially when detached from their usual contexts, they may seem to have little special significance. It is through their almost mystical belief that these symbols are potent enough to be somehow meaningful for everyone that the symbolists (including Crane) hope to insure communication. The doctrine of Symbolism which Wilson finally formulates is this:

Every feeling or sensation we have, every moment of consciousness, is different from every other; and it is, in consequence, impossible to render our sensations as we actually experience them through the conventional and

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3. Quoted by Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle; A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930, p. 20.

4. Wilson, Loc. cit.

universal language of ordinary literature. Each poet has his unique personality; each of his moments has its special tone, its special combination of elements. And it is the poet's task to find, to invent, the special language which will alone be capable of expressing his personality and feelings. Such a language must make use of symbols; what is so special, so fleeting and so vague cannot be conveyed by direct statement or description, but only by a succession of words, of images, which will serve to suggest it to the reader. The Symbolists themselves, full of the idea of producing with poetry effects like those of music, tended to think of these images as possessing an abstract value like musical notes and chords. But the words of our speech are not musical notation, and what the symbols of Symbolism really were, were metaphors detached from their subjects--for one cannot, beyond a certain point, in poetry, merely enjoy color and sound for their own sake; one has to guess what the images are being applied to. And Symbolism may be defined as an attempt by a carefully studied means--a complicated association of ideas represented by a medley of metaphors--to communicate unique personal feelings.<sup>5</sup>

And this communication of unique personal feelings cannot be achieved except through symbols or concepts which can strike deeply into the reader's consciousness to suggest larger, more profound meanings than the simple, more obvious meanings of the symbols themselves.

It is here that the reader of Crane runs into his first difficulty--that of recognizing and applying the larger meanings to the images which the poet has used to suggest his own special ideas or feelings. As stated before, Crane greatly admired the French Symbolists, particularly LaForgue and Rimbaud. Philip Horton speculates that Crane, in his desire "to enrich the province in poetry by poaching on the other

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5. Ibid., pp. 21-22

arts [music and painting], to enlarge his own medium by assimilating or reproducing theirs," was like Rimbaud, "who had wished to invent a poetic language that would be 'accessible to all the senses . . . to write silences, nights . . . to fixate vertigoes.'"<sup>6</sup> And Brom Weber, in his discussion of Rimbaud as one of three men who exerted great influence upon Crane, writes:

Crane's indebtedness to Rimbaud is more than problematical, of course. There is textual evidence that Crane read Rimbaud's poetry as carefully as any writer can ever read another, although it was Rimbaud's aesthetic theory that influenced him first. It is even possible to construct interesting relationships on the further basis of biography . . . We must note . . . that Rimbaud's aesthetic theory was amenable to someone of Crane's temperament, ideas, and ambitions; that Rimbaud's poetry constitutes a high point to the equalling of which a poet might well devote himself; that Rimbaud's spirit was one with which Crane felt a powerful affinity. More specifically, Crane did employ the method of Rimbaud; and there is in his poetry much of the symbolism, imagery, and vocabulary of Rimbaud, although transmuted and re-worked in accordance with an individuality that is unmistakably Crane's own.<sup>7</sup>

In order that the reader may acquire a more complete understanding of the influences which guided Crane in his use of symbolism, it might be appropriate to include here Weber's quotation and analysis of Rimbaud's aesthetic theory, since, of all the French Symbolist poets, Rimbaud was probably the one who influenced Crane most.

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6. Philip Horton, Hart Crane; The Life of an American Poet, p. 170.

7. Weber, op. cit., pp. 149-50.



In the first place, "the I is somebody else." The poet is a medium for the transmission of his song, he exists apart from his self, and it is this self which is his song. Therefore, he must study this self in all its phases: "The first subject for a man to study who wants to be a poet is his own consciousness, all of it. He searches his soul, inspects it, tries it, learns it." Rimbaud implies that the consciousness which has been entrusted to man is timeless, linked both to the past and to the future. In order to study it, one must adopt the methodology of the prophetic visionary, and "The poet makes himself a geer by a long, immense, and reasoned derangement of all the senses. All the forms of love, suffering, folly, he searches in himself, he boils down in himself so as to keep nothing of them but the quintessences." Having distilled the senses, he must convey them in the literary form which is organically inevitable: "If that which he brings back from down there has form, he gives form; if it is unformed he gives uniform." This form must be embodied in a language which is adequate, not an exhausted vehicle of the past, but something new that transcends logical construction by depending on the association of thoughts for a total meaning. "Find a language . . ." Rimbaud wrote. "This language will be of the soul, summarizing everything: smells, sounds, colours . . ."<sup>8</sup>

Since this is the theory that guided Crane in much of his writing, it becomes obvious that to read Crane's poems for the first time is not to understand them fully. One may be impressed, moved, by the sounds of his language, by the richness of tone and color; one may feel perhaps something of the emotion, idea or sensation which the poet is suggesting; but it is not until one has read one of Crane's poems repeatedly that full enjoyment comes; by guessing little by little what is being suggested by all the components of the poem-- sound, structure, rhythm, image--one is carried into an ever-

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8. Ibid., pp. 146-47.

widening stream of sympathy and understanding. The phrases which have been puzzling or obscure before begin one by one to take on significance, then to fall into patterns or groups of larger significance, and finally a realization comes--although perhaps incomplete--of the experience which the poet had in writing the poem.

Yvor Winters has suggested that Crane's seeming obscurity is an advantage for the reader, for it forces his attention upon the details of the lines:

Mr. I. A. Richards has spoken of the strategic value of obscurity, and in the case of a poet whose use of words is so subtly dense with meaning and overtone, whose poems are so free of dead but restful matter, an additional logical obscurity is likely to force the attention upon separate words and lines, and so facilitate at the outset an appreciation of the details as details, which may, in turn, lead on to a grasp of the whole.<sup>9</sup>

When one does fix his attention upon individual lines and images, in the course of repeatedly reading the poems and in working toward a tentative understanding of them, one eventually begins to notice that there are certain images which run through them, certain words or phrases which occur time after time, often in the same or similar combinations. In noting and marking these, one notices how they seem to fall into patterns, and gradually begins to perceive what some of the ideas contained in these patterns are, and what

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9. Yvor Winters, "Hart Crane's Poems," Poetry, XXX (April, 1927), 49.

these images might represent. It is important to emphasize, however, that with Crane they do not represent simply one idea or emotion--Crane's larger meanings are many faceted, and cannot be reduced to a single set of meanings, although one meaning may be central, the others subsidiary.

The remainder of this paper shall be devoted to an analysis of the poems in White Buildings and in The Bridge, and to the conclusions concerning Crane's symbolism derived from the analyses of the poems.

## CHAPTER II

### SYMBOLISM IN THE POEMS IN WHITE BUILDINGS

White Buildings, the first collection of Crane's poetry, was published in December, 1926, when the poet was twenty-seven years of age. The collection consisted chiefly of poems which had been published earlier in various little magazines--The Dial, The Measure, Secession, Poetry, and others. These poems were written over a span of nine years--from 1917 to 1926--and show, as shall be seen in the discussion of the individual poems, Crane's development of a complexity of thought and his mastery of poetic vocabulary.

As stated in the introduction, the images or symbols which Crane employs appear to fall into patterns, and these patterns appear to contain certain key ideas, or themes, which run through many of the poems in the collection White Buildings. Among these themes or threads, there are two which emerge predominantly, if only from the frequency with which the symbols which represent them are repeated. These two themes appear to oppose each other, and in their simplest forms might be stated as human warmth, friendliness, and love, opposed to coldness, alienation, fear and hate. There are also symbols to represent the division, opposition, or dual nature of these themes, and there is still another set of symbols which appear to represent an attempt at unity--a

drawing together of the two opposing themes into some sort of harmonic whole--something which Crane strove for throughout his life, both in his personal life and in his poetry.

Before enlarging upon these themes, it might be well to enumerate some of the symbols which appear to represent them, to notice how they do fall into two distinct groups, and how closely related the symbols within these groups appear to be. They are not unique with Crane; many of them have been used by earlier writers and philosophers--indeed, some of them are as old as the race of man itself. In the first group belong the sun and sunlight, fire and flame, the color red, noon, summer and spring, wine, and blood. Into the second group fall the moon and moonlight, whiteness, snow and ice, winter. There are, of course, many other images, some of them no doubt related to those just listed, others which may or may not be related. Then, further, to these groups of symbols seem to belong certain conceptions which are not named outright, as are the symbols of sun, fire, whiteness, etc., but which are often merely suggested by certain phrases. They belong somewhere in between the two poles of object as symbol and larger theme or meaning; they are suggested, and in turn suggest, further, still larger meanings. The conceptions which are related to the first group of symbols are those of life's change, flux and flow, fertility, femininity

and love, birth and death, and the seasonal cycles; those related to the second group are changelessness, immutability, sterility, masculinity and lust, and eternity.

Then there are a number of terms which Crane used to indicate the division between these two themes; duality is found in such terms as mirror, mid, between, break, broken, line, scatter, independent, divided, partition, torn, sunder, double, twin halves, cleaving and cleft, rend and sever. Finally, there are a number of symbols that appear to represent the unity which Crane was attempting to achieve out of these two opposing themes. There are some rather strong indications that this unity can come only through death, though in the end it remains ambiguous. Sometimes Crane seems to be thinking of some kind of spiritual love, as that which unites passion and intellect and integrates them into something finer; or it may be a force at once love and death. At any rate, there is much love-death-sea symbolism in the poems, especially in the "Voyages." The sea is probably the chief symbol in White Buildings of this unity; for Crane, it has qualities both desirable and undesirable; it is something to be both feared and loved. Other possible symbols of unity are bells and music; perhaps Crane was trying to transpose both these themes into some kind of harmonic and melodic whole.

The concept of the bridge as a symbol of spanning, of

the joining together of these two opposing ideas, appears in White Buildings, lending significance to the fact that Crane chose the symbol and title of The Bridge for his major--what he called his epic--poem. There is frequent use of such terms as adjustment, reconcile, across, mingle, stretch, straddle, span and join. Sleep, too, being connected with the concept of death, seems to be another symbol of unity. The question of what represented unity to Crane is central to an understanding of the final meaning of all Crane's poetry and of the interrelationship of the other symbols he uses. If death is the only final unity for Crane, and if, as seems to be the case, the sea is one of his symbols for unity, the fact that Crane ended his life by leaping from the rail of a ship into the sea takes on an interesting significance.

It is appropriate at this point, then, to look at some of the symbols in the poems, to notice their recurrence, and to arrive at some of their possible meanings.

The symbol of whiteness is one which occurs with more frequency than any other in White Buildings, with the possible exception of the sun and the sea. Crane was familiar with the works of Melville, and loved them (he read Moby Dick at least three times); he employed them as reference materials when writing The Bridge, and commemorated Melville in the

poem "At Melville's Tomb."<sup>10</sup> For this reason, it is interesting to recall Melville's chapter in Moby Dick on "The Whiteness of the Whale," and to notice some of the objects and ideas which he associates with whiteness.

"Bethink thee," he says, "of the albatross, whence come those clouds of spiritual wonderment and pale dread, in which that white phantom sails in all imaginations? Not Coleridge first threw that spell; but God's great, unflattering laureate, Nature."<sup>11</sup>

He speaks of the Albino man, the marble aspect in the pallor of the dead, the muffled rollings of a milky sea, the white depths of the milky way.<sup>12</sup>

"Or is it," he questions, "that as in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blackness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows--a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink?"<sup>13</sup>

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10. Philip Horton, Hart Crane; The Life of an American Poet, pp. 195, 202ff. 222, 287, 329ff.

11. Herman Melville, Moby-Dick, or The Whale, I, 236.

12. Ibid., pp. 238, 243.

13. Ibid., pp. 243-44. Melville's mention of Coleridge suggests another possible influence upon Crane, for Coleridge, too, employed many of the symbols which are found in Crane's poems. Crane was an enthusiastic reader of Coleridge (see Brom Weber, Hart Crane; A Biographical and Critical Study, pp. 127, 308), and it is interesting to compare Crane's use of the symbols of the moon, whiteness, ice and sun with Coleridge's combination of the same symbols in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Crane's mention of the albatross in "Voyages IV" calls to mind both Melville's and Coleridge's use of the albatross symbol. Robert Penn Warren has discussed in some detail Coleridge's use of these symbols. See "A Poem of Pure Imagination: Reconsiderations VI," Kenyon Review, VIII (Summer, 1946), 391-427.



At any rate, whiteness had unpleasant connotations for Crane, as a glance at "North Labrador," one of Crane's earliest poems, will show.

A land of leaning ice  
Hugged by plaster-grey arches of sky,  
Flings itself silently  
Into eternity.

"Has no one come here to win you,  
Or left you with the faintest blush  
Upon your glittering breasts?  
Have you no memories, O Darkly Bright?"

Cold-hushed, there is only the shifting of moments  
That journey toward no Spring--  
No birth, no death, no time nor sun  
In answer.<sup>14</sup>

The symbols here are not so numerous as to be excessively confusing. There is, clearly the idea of timelessness, unchanging, in "eternity," "no memories," "the shifting of moments that journey toward no spring,"--no seasonal cycles, nor time; "no birth, no death,"--no life cycles. "No sun," of course, is mentioned, and there is probably a reference to the sun in "no one leaving the faintest blush upon your glittering breasts"--a reference to the red reflected light of sunrise or sunset; "blush" also indicates life, and carries connotations of blood--the stream of life--which is lacking here. "O Darkly Bright" recalls Melville's "dumb blackness, full of meaning, in a landscape of snows." Here

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14. Hart Crane, The Collected Poems of Hart Crane, p. 78.

there is light, but a cold, black light, and throughout the poem there is a blank, unending whiteness.

But beyond the symbols within the poem, there appears another--what does the title, "North Labrador," signify? Does the poet simply envisage such a land as cold and lifeless and therefore evil--and in this connection one remembers that the ninth and final ring of Hell in Dante's Inferno was that of freezing cold. Or does the land represent the poet's feeling of complete sterility at times, or the blank futility which life sometimes seems to be, in such a way that life and death have lost their meaning? Is it a criticism of society, or a statement of the poet's feeling about society? It may be all of these things, and more. Here, immediately, is the limitation of all symbolist poetry--we are not permitted to ask exactly what the poet's emotion was at the time of writing the poem--we can only know in terms of his images--as he can only suggest in their terms.

Having looked at Crane's use of one of the major symbols for the idea of coldness, alienation, and fear--whiteness--we may turn to another, the symbol used most frequently to represent the opposite theme--the life-giving sun, representing warmth and love. "Garden Abstract" is another of Crane's early poems, and as in "North Labrador," the symbolism is not so packed as to be extremely difficult.

The apple on its bough is her desire,--  
Shining suspension, mimic of the sun.

The bough has caught her breath up, and her voice,  
Dumbly articulate in the slant and rise  
Of branch on branch above her, blurs her eyes.  
She is the prisoner of the tree and its green fingers.

And so she comes to dream herself the tree,  
The wind possessing her, weaving her young veins,  
Holding her to the sky and its quick blue,  
Drowning the fever of her hands in sunlight,  
She has no memory, nor fear, nor hope  
Beyond the grass and shadows at her feet.<sup>15</sup>

What a different picture this poem presents when contrasted with "North Labrador"! Here are life and warmth, and a human being possessed by the joy and ecstasy which these things bring. The girl is caught up in a moment of desire--the apple is, as a mimic of the sun and carrying the vision of redness, a symbol of warmth, of passion. That she is the prisoner of the green fingers of the tree is significant also, as one of Crane's symbols for love seems to be hands. There is warmth, too, in "weaving of young veins" and in "drowning the fever of her hands in sunlight." Finally, all doubt, all conflict, is lost in the utter possession of the moment--"no memory, nor fear, nor hope." Brom Weber has said of this poem that it possesses "frank delight . . . in the joys of physical living, in lust and passion, in the caress of the wind and the warmth of the sun."<sup>16</sup>

These, then, are the two themes, the two forces, which

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15. Ibid., p. 70.

16. Weber, op. cit., p. 77.

were pulling at Crane, and symbols representing these themes occur throughout most of the poems in White Buildings, no matter what the subject of a particular poem might be. As Crane's mastery of his technique developed, his poetry became more compact, with a resultant crowding of more and more symbols into a single poem. And as Crane's personal emotional problems increased, as his hope for some kind of synthesis of his position as a poet with the materialistic society of America, and for a synthesis of his duality of nature became more desperate, he sought more constantly for some kind of unity, some binding factor which would make an integrated whole of his personality and his poetry. He finally ended his personal struggle by taking his own life; whether or not he came to feel, in his poetry, that death was the only unity is a problem which we shall consider further. But first it is necessary to consider some of the other poems in White Buildings, to find to what extent this symbolism appears, and what other problems Crane considered in his poetry.

From "Recitative," from which the title, White Buildings, is taken, it may be possible to extract some of the larger meanings out of the profusion of symbols which occur in it, and to gain a fuller understanding of the difficulties which exist in Crane's symbolism.

Regard the capture here, O Janus-faced,  
As double as the hands that twist this glass.

Such eyes at search or rest you cannot see;  
 Reciting pain or glee, how can you bear!

Twin shadowed halves: the breaking second holds  
 In each the skin alone, and so it is  
 I crust a plate of vibrant mercury  
 Borne cleft to you, and brother in the half.

Inquire this much-exacting fragment smile,  
 Its drums and darkest blowing leaves ignore,--  
 Defer though, revocation of the tears  
 That yield attendance to one crucial sign.

Look steadily--how the wind feasts and spins  
 The brain's disk shivered against lust. Then watch  
 While darkness, like an ape's face, falls away,  
 And gradually white buildings answer day.

Let the same nameless gulf beleaguer us--  
 Alike suspend us from atrocious sums  
 Built floor by floor on shafts of steel that grant  
 The plummet heart, like Absalom, no stream.

The highest tower,--let her ribs palisade  
 Wrenched gold of Nineveh;--yet leave the tower.  
 The bridge swings over salvage, beyond wharves;  
 A wind abides the ensign of your will...

In alternating bells have you not heard  
 All hours clapped dense into a single stride?  
 Forgive me for an echo of these things,  
 And let us walk through time with equal pride.<sup>17</sup>

Upon several readings of the poem, one may arrive at the meaning of the poet looking at himself in a mirror, and speaking of his dual nature--passion and warmth of emotion as opposed to the ivory tower (white buildings) of the intellect--and perhaps in the final stanza assuring himself that the two can be fused into a kind of unity. Then, upon

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17. Crane, op. cit., p. 91.

discovering Crane's explanation of the poem in a letter to Allen Tate, who was puzzled by it when it appeared in its unrevised form in The Little Review, one begins to realize how many meanings may be attached to a poem employing symbols by the poet himself, as well as the additional meanings which may occur to the reader:

"Imagine the poet," he wrote in reply to Tate's queries, "say, on a platform speaking it. The audience is one half of Humanity, Man (in the sense of Blake) and the poet the other. ALSO, the poet sees himself in the audience as in a mirror. ALSO, the audience sees itself, in part, in the poet. Against this paradoxical DUALITY is posed the UNITY, or the conception of it (as you got it) in the last verse. In another sense, the poet is talking to himself all the way through the poem, and there are, as too often in my poems, other reflexes and symbolisms in the poem also which it would be silly to write here--at least for the present."<sup>18</sup>

Looking at some of the symbols in the poem, one may notice how they may suggest some of these meanings. Duality, of course, appears in the vision of the poet and his image in the glass, in the terms "Janus-faced," "twin shadowed halves," "cleft," "brother in the half." Intellect as opposed to passion is found in "the brain's disk shivered against lust," in the darkness falling away to reveal white buildings, in the sums built floor on floor (of the buildings) that grant the heart no stream (of life--blood), in the tower, which the poet bids himself, or the reader, or the audience, to

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18. Quoted by Horton, op. cit., pp. 171-72.

leave for the bridge, which is the span to link them with humanity, life, and which is also a symbol of unity. Then, in the final stanza, fairly clearly, comes a plea for unity: "hours elapped dense into a single stride," "walk through time with equal pride."

There is still another level of meaning in the poem. Crane is probably speaking to the audience as to America, asking for a position in America as a poet, asking for understanding and cooperation from his audience, bidding them to leave a place in the city with its material and commercial pursuits ("atrocious sums built floor on floor") for the heart--for emotion, for kindness ("Defer though, revocation of the tears"), for poetry. The poet wants to be included in the humanity of America, and he wants America to include the poet--"let the same nameless gulf beleaguer us." He asks America to leave the tower--the city and all it stands for--for the bridge, which shall synthesize the duality he has been speaking of. Crane wrote this poem in the fall of 1923, shortly after he had conceived the idea of writing The Bridge; his use of the bridge as a symbol of unity in this poem is no doubt a reflection of Crane's absorption at this time in the concept of the longer poem, which was to be a synthesis of America.

The fact that Crane felt most of his life a sharp divergence between his position as an artist and the attitudes

of materialistic, middle-class America toward the artist is no doubt the basis of much of his use of symbols representing coldness, neglect, indifference, and even hate. This feeling probably had its origin in Crane's relationship with his father, a typical prosperous business man who wanted Hart to succeed him in his candy business, and who was totally unable to understand a son who wanted to be a poet. The problem of the artist in American was a very real one for Crane, although it gave rise to certain internal conflicts which he was unable to resolve. Crane's indentifying commercial America with his father helps to explain his ambivalence; he could neither completely reject or accept either without feelings of guilt. He had a definite feeling that the artist was being brushed aside in the mad scramble for money and in the glorification of materialistic values in the 1920's. Yet he believed that deep in the American heritage and in the American future there was much rich material for the poet, and that this material, if given form and direction by a poet such as himself, would go far to awaken in America a sense of spiritual values. In this belief he had much in common with Whitman, whom he greatly admired, and whose poetry influenced him considerably. In an essay entitled "General Aims and Theories," which Crane wrote in 1925, he stated:

I am concerned with the future of America, but not because I think that America has any so-called par value as a state or as a group of people . . . It is only because I feel persuaded that here are destined to be discovered



certain as yet undefined spiritual quantities, perhaps a new hierarchy of faith not to be developed so completely elsewhere. And in this process I like to feel myself as a potential factor; certainly I must speak in its terms and what discoveries I may make are situated in its experience.<sup>19</sup>

It is nevertheless true that he did feel much bitterness about the artist's being frustrated by the necessity of earning a living when doing so not only left him with very little time for creative effort, but also left him physically and spiritually exhausted. This experience was Crane's both when he worked at various positions in the employ of his father and when he was writing copy for advertising agencies. Two poems, especially, which give voice to this feeling are "Praise for an Urn" and "Chaplinesque."

"Praise for an Urn" is subtitled, "In Memoriam: Ernest Nelson," and Allen Tate has called it the finest elegy written by an American poet.<sup>20</sup> Nelson was an older man, a friend of Crane who died only a few months after their first meeting. He had been both a painter and a poet in his youth, but his talents had disintegrated under the pressure of making a living in a lithograph factory. His failure aroused such great sympathy in Crane that his death inspired "Praise for an

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19. Hart Crane, "General Aims and Theories," included in Horton, op. cit., Appendix I, p. 325.

20. Allen Tate, "In Memoriam: Hart Crane," Hound and Horn, V (July-September, 1932), 618.

Urn."<sup>21</sup> An examination of the poem in terms of its symbols will help to clarify Crane's attitude toward the problem.

It was a kind and northern face  
That mingled in such exile guise  
The everlasting eyes of Pierrot  
And, of Gargantua, the laughter.

His thoughts, delivered to me  
From the white coverlet and pillow,  
I see now, were inheritances--  
Delicate riders of the storm.

Here is the picture of the artist--kind, and mingling the warmth of Pierrot, the gentle clown, with the gusty laughter of Gargantua. The second stanza shows the delicate sensibility of the artist, who inherits the thoughts and spirit of his Norse ancestors.

The slant moon on the slanting hill  
Once moved us toward presentiments  
Of what the dead keep, living still,  
And such assessments of the soul

As, perched in the crematory lobby,  
The insistent clock commented on,  
Touching as well upon our praise  
Of glories proper to the time.

This is the tragedy of the artist's situation. The moon, symbol of the feeling of coldness and indifference (Crane speaks elsewhere of "deaf moonlight"), has in a sense given a foreshadowing of just such a situation, where the man has outlived his reason for living and his joy in living--his poetic talent--and is therefore dead, killed by "assess-

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21. Horton, op. cit., p. 113.

ments"--material demands--upon the soul. The "insistent clock" may also be a symbol of the material world, which lives by clocks, and it, too, has an influence upon the "glories proper to the time"--the glories of artistic creation.

Still, having in mind gold hair,  
I cannot see that broken brow  
And miss the dry sound of bees  
Stretching across a lucid space.

Weber calls "gold hair" one of Crane's symbols for love,<sup>22</sup> probably rightly, as it appears in other poems connected with love symbolism. The "broken brow" is broken by the weight of material necessity, and bearing in mind his love for his friend, seeing him broken by unnecessary and futile effort, the poet thinks of the creative effort, the artistic work, symbolized by the "sound of bees," that his friend might have "stretched across space" to bridge the distance between the material and artistic worlds.

Scatter these well-meant idioms  
Into the smoky spring that fills  
The suburbs, where they will be lost.  
They are no trophies of the sun.<sup>23</sup>

But finally, Crane recognizes the futility of commemorating his friend in words--the words will be lost in the "suburbs",

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22. Weber, op. cit., p. 110

23. Hart Crane, The Collected Poems of Hart Crane, pp. 68-69.

an obvious symbol of middle-class America. The cry of the poet for a place is in vain. The smoke of "smoky spring" is a reference to the smoke of industry, the backbone of suburbia, and one of the chief manifestations of a materialistic society. Spring in America is at best "smoky," filtered through that white, negative symbol of industrialism. "They are no trophies of the sun": they are not the pure products of absolute fertility and warmth, even as the spring is not, but rather of the coldness and futility which the poet finds in the world.

"Chaplinesque" expresses much the same feeling. Crane, commenting upon the symbolism and meaning of the poem, explained that the "we" of the poem "expressed his feeling of identity as poet with Chaplin, the tragi-comic buffoon, and that poetry, or human feelings, was symbolized by the kitten in the wilderness."<sup>24</sup>

We make our meek adjustments,  
Contented with such random consolations  
As the wind deposits  
In slithered and too ample pockets.

For we can still love the world, who find  
A famished kitten on the step, and know  
Recesses for it from the fury of the street,  
Or warm torn elbow coverts.

We will sidestep, and to the final smirk  
Dally the doom of that inevitable thumb  
That slowly chafes its puckered index toward us,

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24. Horton, op. cit., p. 99.

Facing the dull squint with what innocence  
And what surprise!

And yet these fine collapses are not lies  
More than the pirouettes of any pliant cane;  
Our obsequies are, in a way, no enterprise.  
We can evade you, and all else but the heart:  
What blame to us if the heart live on.

The game enforces smirks; but we have seen  
The moon in lonely alleys make  
A grail of laughter of an empty ash can,  
And through all sound of gaiety and quest  
Have heard a kitten in the wilderness.<sup>25</sup>

Crane wrote of the poem:

I have made that "infinitely gentle, infinitely suffering thing" of Eliot's into the symbol of the kitten. I feel that, from my standpoint, the pantomime of Charlie represents fairly well the futile gesture of the poet in the U.S.A. today, perhaps elsewhere too. And yet, the heart lives on . . .<sup>26</sup>

And Horton says that it is significant for an understanding of the poem to know that while he was writing it, his occupation was tramping about the streets of the city delivering handbills.<sup>27</sup>

The title, then, gives the first symbol--Chaplin representing the disillusionment of the poet in the modern world. Crane called Chaplin "the prime interpreter of the soul imposed upon by modern civilization."<sup>28</sup> His efforts at

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25. Hart Crane, The Collected Poems of Hart Crane, pp. 73-74.

26. Quoted by Horton, op. cit., p. 100.

27. Loc. cit.

28. Weber, op. cit., p. 108.

evasion of his fate are borne out in the terms "adjustments" and "consolations." The wind appears to symbolize for Crane at most times the workings of chance, circumstance, or accident. The kitten, as Crane has explained, represents poetry or human feelings, which he is sheltering from "the fury of the street"--the cruelty of the modern world. "The inevitable thumb" offers more difficulty, but the meaning becomes clear after it is explained that it belongs to the policeman who constantly reproves the kind actions which Chaplin in his films performs for other less fortunate than he.<sup>29</sup> The policeman, then, might be a symbol of Crane's father and of unsympathetic society in general. The third stanza shows the poet evading the doom of his feelings in the world, and in the fourth stanza he redeems only the heart, symbol of warmth, kindness, love, as the one thing that has any real meaning in the world of today. In the last stanza, it is the "game" of life that enforces smirks, but there are consolations--finding beauty and warmth in homely things such as an ash can, and hearing the cry for beauty and emotion through the sounds of gaiety and quest for wealth in the wilderness of the world.

In these two poems there is an indication of what one meaning may be, then, for the duality in Crane's poems. As

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29. Ibid., p. 109.

in "Recitative" the duality is between the poet and his audience, and also between the two natures of the poet himself--the coldness of his intellect and the warmth of his emotion--here the duality is between the cold indifference of commercial America of the twenties and the poet who is trying to restore to it some of the basic human values and feelings. That both of these ideas, as well as others, may be represented in many of the poems which contain the symbols of the two themes shall become evident upon examination of more of the poems in White Buildings.

"Sunday Morning Apples" is dedicated to Crane's friend William Sommer, a painter who lived in the Brandywine Valley near Cleveland. Horton says that Crane was drawn to Sommer "by his vitality, the Rabelaisian vigor of his spirits, which was reflected in his painting in what Crane liked to call his 'dynamism.'"<sup>30</sup> Art, as well as music, had great power to stimulate Crane. He studied books on art, and El Greco was one of his favorites. Crane greatly admired Sommer's painting, and wrote "Sunday Morning Apples" after a visit to Sommer's studio in August of 1922 "out of sheer joy."<sup>31</sup> It is one of Crane's "warm" poems, as a glance at the lines will show.

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30. Horton, op. cit., p. 110

31. Weber, op. cit., p. 114.





And poise them full and ready for explosion--  
The apples, Bill, the apples!<sup>32</sup>

Weber has suggested that the third stanza may refer to a painting by Sommer,<sup>33</sup> (as may the second stanza) or that it may be the result of Crane's reading of F. D. Ouspensky, Russian philosopher, who had stated in his Tertium Organum that a dog is unable to understand the principle of recurrence, and that consequently the sun which rises anew every morning is perceived by the dog as "a new sun."<sup>34</sup> This idea of spontaneity--seeing everything as new--may be relevant to Crane's desire to escape from memory--particularly the memories of his unhappy childhood. It is also possible that Crane merely wanted to set down in words the glorious feeling of joy and warmth that he found in the Brandywine Valley. Certainly the sun is the symbol of life-giving warmth, and there is a feeling of uncontaminated warm spirits in the picture of the boy running with his dog in the sun. There is in this stanza, and throughout the poem, a communication of the warmth, the kindness, and the natural joy that Crane found in rural life. Here is another aspect of Crane's ambivalence--the warmth and beauty of the country as opposed to

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67. 32. Hart Crane, The Collected Poems of Hart Crane, p.

33. Weber, op. cit., p. 151.

34. Ibid., pp. 151-152

the city, for Crane frequently expresses, as has been noted in "Recitative" and "Chaplinesque," his feeling of the coldness and unconscious cruelty of the city. In the last stanza warmth is symbolized again in the apples, with their ripe red color, in "seasonable madness" and in "wine." The entire stanza carries the feeling of spontaneous joy and warm enthusiasm. For the title, "Sunday Morning Apples," the probable explanation is that since both Crane and Sommer worked in Cleveland during the week, it was on a Sunday morning that Crane paid the visit to the painter's studio which inspired the poem.

Probably one of the most difficult poems that Crane ever wrote is "Possessions." It is an outstanding example of an attempt to communicate unique personal feelings, one of purposes of the Symbolists. More than any of the poems discussed thus far, it defies syntactical analysis and the explanation of symbols isolated from their context. Crane himself realized this when he wrote:

In manipulating the more imponderable phenomena of psychic ~~motives~~, pure emotional crystallizations, etc. I have had to rely even more on these dynamics of inferential mention, and I am doubtless still very unconscious of having committed myself to what seems nothing but obscurities to some minds. A poem like Possessions really cannot be technically explained. It must rely (even to a large extent with myself) on its organic impact on the imagination to successfully imply its meaning. This seems to me to present an exceptionally difficult problem, however, considering the real clarity and consis-

tent logic of many of the other poems.<sup>35</sup>

In the light of this, it would seem most impractical and nearly impossible to study this poem stanza by stanza in an attempt to clear up the syntax and show what each individual symbol represents. However, it may be possible to look at the poem as a whole to discover what "organic impact" it has on the imagination, and with that impact in mind, to clarify some of the details.

Witness now this trust! the rain  
That steals softly direction  
And the key, ready to hand--sifting  
One moment in sacrifice (the direst)  
Through a thousand nights the flesh  
Assaults outright for bolts that linger  
Hidden,--O undirected as the sky  
That through its black foam has no eyes  
For this fixed stone of lust...

Accumulate such moments to an hour;  
Account the total of this trembling tabulation.  
I know the screen, the distant flying taps  
And stabbing medley that sways--  
And the mercy, feminine, that stays  
As though prepared.

And I, entering, take up the stone  
As quiet as you can make a man...  
In Bleecker Street, still trenchant in a void  
Wounded by apprehensions out of speech,  
I hold it up against a disk of light--  
I, turning, turning on smoked forking spires,  
The city's stubborn lives, desires.

Tossed on these horns, who bleeding dies,  
Lacks all but piteous admissions to be spilt  
Upon the page whose blind sum finally burns  
Record of rage and partial appetites,

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35. Hart Crane, "General Aims and Theories," included in Horton, op. cit., Appendix I, pp. 327-28.

The pure possession, the inclusive cloud  
 Whose heart is fire shall come,--the white wind raze  
 All but bright stones wherein our smiling plays.<sup>36</sup>

The "impact" of the poem might be something like this:

the poet is speaking of the consuming power of lust, which, having known, he is contemplating in quiet horror, thinking perhaps he can find release from its power by writing the poem ("spilt upon the page") or by love ("the inclusive cloud whose heart is fire"--as opposed to "partial appetites"), whose fire is purifying, not degrading or disgusting. The overtones are those of a simple narrative, wherein the poet is telling of visits made to a lover (in Bleecker Street, perhaps), in the rain, and the key is the doorway to the lover's room, which the poet enters, desiring sexual satisfaction, and yet repelled both by the prospect and the fact. But there is another, deeper intent underlying the superficial narrative; and therein lies the richness of symbolist poetry. For this reason an analysis of the first stanza, whose syntax is difficult, would probably be helpful, since, for a full realization of the symbolism, one must know how the symbols are being applied.

The symbolism is, of course, sexual. The "rain that steals direction" and the "key" seem to be phallic symbols, and the "one moment in direct sacrifice" the moment of climax

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36. Hart Crane, The Collected Poems of Hart Crane, pp. 82-83.

in the nights when "the flesh assaults outright." The "key," then, is "sifting" or searching for "bolts that linger hidden." One might take "bolt" here to mean a kind of lock--the lock for which the key is searching. But a bolt is not the kind of lock that can be opened with a key, and so could be a symbol of love, which cannot be found through lust, since lust is as "undirected" as a black sky which "has no eyes" (contains no stars, and so lacks the means of direction or guidance). Thus the poet, who confronts sexual experience trustingly ("Witness now this trust!"), is betrayed. The love and peace that he has sought remain hidden.

In the second stanza comes the admission that the experience is a personal one with the poet. "I know the screen" (the thousand nights) and the "stabbing medley that sways" (the act of lust). There is an indication that lust is masculine, and that mercy, or love, is feminine. And the poet is accounting the total of such moments to see what he has had.

The third stanza finds the poet appalled into silence by the enormity of lust; he is "wounded" speechless "by apprehensions," but is still mentally keen enough ("trenchant") to hold what he has found up to the light and examine it. "Trenchant" also means incisive or penetrating, so that "trenchant in a void" has sexual connotations as well in this line. There is a picture in this stanza of the poet gazing

out of a round window ("disk of light") upon the spires of the city ("smoked forking spires"), meditating upon the horror of lust and desire, not only his own, but humanity's. The linking of lust and the city has meaning, also, as both were at once repellent and fascinating to Crane.

In the final stanza, the poet, who is "tossed on these horns"--that is, of the dilemma of being both attracted and repelled by lust--and "who bleeding dies," has lost everything but the power to cry out an admission of his dilemma by setting it down in the poem in order to find release. The effect of writing the poem is to cleanse the mind of the memory of lust ("blind sum finally burns record of rage and partial appetites"). In the last three lines the poet seems to take the problem away from himself in an effort to find a universal solution. There is an indication of a cleansing fire which is all-inclusive, and which shall destroy on a public scale, burning the lustful city and bringing death and freedom at once, corresponding to the explosion of the sexual orgasm which achieves the same thing on a personal level. There is in the lines something of the ancient identification of love and death, and of the notion that the moment of sexual consummation is, in a sense, death.

To turn from a poem like "Possessions" to "Lachrymae Christi" is to see the instability of Crane's nature, and thus of his poetic expression, for seldom can Crane be di-

forced from his poetry. Other poets and writers have been able to attain a certain objectivity about their work, and had Crane been able to do this, much of his confusion might have given way to clarity. Certainly he was not intentionally obscure, but the nature of his psychological make-up, his conflicts never far beneath the surface, prevented his approaching his work with any great degree of detachment. Thus when his tortured spirit turns from "Possessions" to "Lachrymae Christi," and seems to achieve some degree of peace, it is evident that something must have occurred in Crane's personal life to bring that peace. Weber calls it "a poem in which the means of adjustment, temporary though it may be, are saluted by Crane. The poem is a song of thanksgiving, a hymn of praise."<sup>37</sup> The answer to this change of tone from "Possessions," written in the fall of 1923, to "Lachrymae Christi" in the spring of 1924 may be, as Weber states, that ". . . the cloud of fire had swept over him-- Crane had fallen in love."<sup>38</sup> There is some element of doubt here, however, for Crane wrote the first version of "Lachrymae Christi" in February, and the letter in which he told Waldo Frank of his love affair, stating that "For many days now, I have gone about quite dumb with something for which "happi-

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37. Weber, op. cit., p. 234.

38. Ibid., p. 235.

ness' must be too mild a term. . .<sup>39</sup> is dated April 21, 1924. And if it is a love poem, it contains a number of elements which indicate that there is an ambivalence still; certain of the symbols show that the peace is not without bitterness, as shall be seen upon examination of the poem itself.

Whitely, while benzine  
Rinsings from the moon  
Dissolve all but the windows of the mills  
(Inside the sure machinery  
Is still  
And curdled only where a sill  
Sluices its one unyielding smile)

Immaculate venom binds  
The fox's teeth, and swart  
Thorns freshen on the year's  
First blood. From flanks unfended,  
Twanged red perfidies of spring  
Are trillion on the hill.

First of all, there is the employment of terms which by now are familiar as significant to Crane--whitely, moon, blood, red, spring. So the problem becomes that of determining how the symbols are being applied. And there is duality between the city with "mills and machinery," and the country--"hill." But while the scene is a peaceful one--the bustle and clang of industrialism are quieted--it is "benzine rinsings from the moon" that have "dissolved all but the windows of the mills." The picture is that of the moonlight reflected on the windows, while the rest of the buildings remains in dark-

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39. Weber, loc. cit.



ness, but the symbolism indicates that while the cleansing has come, it is a cold, an ironic cleansing; neither "benzine" nor "moon" indicate warmth. Inside the mill the "sure machinery" (sure in the sense of relentless) is still, except where the water is running on the sill, unyielding to the stilling effect of the night and the moon. The effect of the stanza is one of washing away not only the ugliness but also the power of industry; however, the harshness of this cleansing is evident also in the "immaculate venom" (of the moon) (whitely) binding the "fox's teeth" (machinery). And the thorns remind the poet of the crucifixion of Christ in the spring. The thorns are "perfidies of spring," since they drew blood on the brow of Christ. The tone of the first two stanzas is that of betrayal; the spring does not bring beauty, but thorns; the cleansing has in it not warmth, but "venom,"

And the nights opening  
 Chant pyramids,--  
 Ancient with innocence,--recall  
 To music and retrieve what perjuries  
 Had galvanized the eyes.

While chime

Beneath and all around  
 Distilling clemencies,--worms'  
 Inaudible whistle, tunneling  
 Not penitence  
 But song, as these  
 Perpetual fountains, vines,--

Thy Nazarene and tinder eyes.

But the cleansing, harsh though it is, is achieved,  
 and the opening of the spring night bring renewal--chanting,  
 innocence, music (beauty and unity)--and washes away the

perjuries (lies or falseness of industry) which had coated ("galvanized") the eyes so that they could not see beauty and innocence. All around chime "distilling" (purifying) clemencies or mercies. The worms' (underground trains') whistle, a symbol of industry, is inaudible, and the poet substitutes as his offering not penitence (for not having seen beauty), but song (the poem) as his answer to these "perpetual fountains"--the continually flowing mercy or renewal of Christ's eyes. R. P. Blackmur has made some interesting comments on some of the lines of the poem which should be worth while noting here.

.....Nazarene, the epithet for Christ, is here used as an adjective of quality in conjunction with the noun tinder also used as an adjective; an arrangement which will seem baffling only to those who underestimate the seriousness with which Crane remodelled words. The first three lines of the poem read:

Whitely, while benzine  
Rinsings from the moon  
Dissolve all but the windows of the mills.

Benzine is a fluid, cleansing and solvent, has a characteristic tang and smart to it, and is here associated with the light of the moon, which, through the word "rinsings," is itself modified by it. It is, I think, the carried-over influence of benzine which gives startling aptness to Nazarene . . . . The influence of one word upon the other reminds us that Christ the Saviour cleanses and solves and has, too, the quality of light. "Tinder" is a simpler instance of how Crane could at once isolate a word and bind it in, impregnating it with new meaning. Tinder is used to kindle fire, powder, and light; a word incipient and bristling with the action proper to its being. The association is completed when it is remembered that tinder is very nearly a homonym for

tender, and, in this setting, puns upon it.<sup>40</sup>

The comparison of Christ with the moon in that both give light and that both are used in this poem as cleansing, purifying forces, is most apt; there is, however, a contrast too, in that the moon sheds a cold light, Christ's eyes a warm (tinder) light. And the cleansing power of the moon is a harsh, almost antiseptic cleansing; Christ's is warm, human.

(Let sphinxes from the ripe  
Borage of death have cleared my tongue  
Once and again; vermin and red  
No longer bind. Some sentient cloud  
Of tears flocks through the tendoned loam:  
Betrayed stones slowly speak.)

Concerning the first clause of this parenthesis, Blackmur has again made a helpful attempt at interpretation.

. . . It is syntax rather than grammar that is obscure. I take it that "let" here is a somewhat homemade adjective and that Crane is making a direct statement so that the problem is to construe the right meanings of the right words in the right references; which will be an admirable exercise in exegesis, but an exercise only. The applicable senses of "let" are these: neglected or weary, permitted or prevented, hired, and let in the sense that blood is let. Sphinxes are inscrutable, have secrets, propound riddles to travellers and strangle those who cannot answer. "Borage" has at least three senses: something rough (sonally suggestive of barrage and barrier), a blue-flowered, hairy-leaved plant, and a cordial made from the plant. The Shorter Oxford Dictionary quotes this jingle from Hooker: "I Borage always bring courage." One guess is that Crane meant something to the effect that if you meditate enough on death it has the same bracing and warming effect as drinking a

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40. R. P. Blackmur, "New Thresholds, New Anatomies. Notes on a Text by Hart Crane," The Double Agent: Essays in Craft and Elucidation, pp. 135-36.

cordial, so that the riddles of life (or death) are answered. But something very near the contrary may have been intended, or both. In any case a guess is ultimately worthless, because, with the defective syntax, the words do not verify it. . . . 41

Something which may shed additional light upon this clause is the quotation by Horton of some lines of an earlier poem which were incorporated into this passage of "Lachrymae Christi":

At length the vermin  
and the rod  
blind thee at once,--

. . . . .

The sphinx upon the ripe  
borage of death clears  
with her tail thy tongue  
and instantly shall dare  
ask from the embers of thy lungs  
a measure of full praise....42

From all this perhaps a meaning like the following can be derived: From having come near to, or tasted, the inscrutable riddle of death, from having experienced horror and pain, the poet's tongue has been cleared, so that he can speak freely, without repression, now that he has found peace. Crane may also have been referring to the fact that he used alcohol as a stimulant in writing poetry, and that it gave him release.43

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41. Ibid., pp. 136-37.

42. Horton, op. cit., p. 173

43. However, in the early version, the sphinx's being upon the borage would seem to indicate the plant meaning for the word. Crane had great faith in words, and used them because he liked their sounds, trusting the sound to communicate where the literal meaning might not.

At any rate, he is no longer bound by "vermin" (offensive people--perhaps those who were unsympathetic to poetry or beauty) or "rod" (as an instrument of punishment or as a scepter and a symbol of authority, tyranny and oppression). The "sentient cloud of tears" is a reference to the tears of Christ, bringing mercy and love, which flow through the poet's being ("tendoned loam") much as rain falls upon the earth, at once cleansing and revitalizing it. "Betrayed stones" indicate that the poet, who had in "Possessions" been betrayed by lust, and by the city and machine, has, through the merciful quality of Christ's tears, regained the power to speak of the beautiful.

Names peeling from Thine eyes  
And their undimming lattices of flame,  
Spell out in palm and pain  
Compulsion of the year, O Nazarene.

Instead of tears falling, names are "peeling" from the eyes of Christ, with their undimming flame, or warmth. "Names" might be a reference to words, which tell in palm ("palm" seems to be a "warm" symbol for Crane, suggesting tropic beauty and freedom,<sup>44</sup> and here may also be a reference to Palm Sunday, and perhaps a symbol of happiness) and pain (suffering, possibly Christ's suffering on the Cross) the "compulsion of the year"--the compelling forces of life,

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44. See Hart Crane, "Royal Palm," The Collected Poems of Hart Crane, p. 121.

realities, some of which bring happiness, others suffering.

Lean long from sable, slender boughs,  
Unstanch'd and luminous. And as the nights  
Strike from Thee perfect spheres,  
Lift up in lilac-emerald breath the grail  
Of earth again--

Thy face  
From charred and riven stakes, O  
Dionysus, Thy  
Unmangled target smile.<sup>45</sup>

Here is the final praise, the final hope, the song of peace. The poet seems to identify Christ with Dionysus, the god of wine and drama and spring, and the "sable slender boughs," in addition to signifying the Cross, may, Miss Walton suggests, be a reference to the old druidical sacrifices.<sup>46</sup> The poet is asking Christ to continue to preserve beauty and love for mankind through His sacrifice, and to life up again the "grail of earth"--the hope of man, Christ's face--which, although it has been the "target" of much abuse, is still "unmangled," and its smile is unextinguishable, much as the Cross, although "charred and riven" from its abuse by mankind, is still the symbol of that sacrifice.

Thus the poet has finally found a hope, a positive belief in love and beauty, and the poem is, as suggested before, a song of thanksgiving and praise.

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45. Ibid., pp. 84-85.

46. George K. Anderson and Eda Lou Walton, This Generation; A Selection of British and American Literature from 1914 to the Present with Historical and Critical Essays, p. 599.

"Lachrymae Christi," a poem in which Crane achieves catharsis and peace, and sings of praise and love, foresees the "Voyages" sequence, in which all the poems but the first and possibly the last are love songs, and all of which, with the exception of "Voyages I," written in October, 1921, were composed between April, 1924 and April, 1925, the period of the love affair mentioned earlier. The fact that this affair, like all Crane's important love affairs with the exception of the last, was homosexual, is of little importance in considering the influence which it had upon Crane's work, except for the fact that Crane's lover was a seaman, and from time to time made voyages from which he returned to the rooming house in Brooklyn where Crane was living at the time. But the poems in the sequence that are love poems bear little evidence of this aspect of the affair.

The poems serve not only to open new horizons in the study of Crane's symbolism, but also to crystallize some of the conceptions already gained. For while they bring into the study love--not only love as a powerful, overwhelming emotion for another person, but also the role of love universally in human life--they also usher in the sea, with all its terrible beauty, all its deception, its all-inclusiveness, its power of destruction, and its fascination. The "Voyages" sequence serves as a particular example of how the sea is perhaps the chief symbol of the unity which Crane was seek-

ing for his dualisms. But although the sea seems to be linked, in Crane's mind, inextricably with death, most of the "Voyages" are love poems. If there was a confusion or ambiguity of love and/or death as the final unity, as the last lines of "Possessions" seem to indicate, and if, as this seems to suggest, Crane was really in love with death, (and his final leap into the sea seems, at least superficially, to bear this out), there is irony in his use of The Bridge as the title of his major poem. As the symbol of the spanning or unifying force which was to link poetically America's traditional past with her great industrial present and her hope or vision of the future, in the broad Whitmanian sense, it is merely the expression of the bright, false optimism that he would be able to reconcile himself to, and find a place in, modern society. It is therefore, in spite of all its passages of truly great poetry, as far as Crane the man was concerned, a failure.

It will be easier to determine the truth or falseness of this speculation after examining The Bridge. First, a more minute examination of the "Voyages" is necessary to see just how Crane used the symbol of the sea in his love poems.

"Voyages I" serves as an introduction to the remainder of the sequence. Although it was written nearly three years before any of the others, and is not a love poem, it does set the tone--sound the keynote--for the remainder of the



sequence, and it is probably for this reason that it is included with them. (It was originally published in Secession as "The Bottom of the Sea is Cruel.") While it has a brilliant clarity that is not found in many of Crane's other poems, it lacks some of the richness of symbol and language that characterizes the other "Voyages."

Above the fresh ruffles of the surf  
Bright striped urchins flay each other with sand.  
They have contrived a conquest for shell shucks,  
And their fingers crumble fragments of baked weed  
Gaily digging and scattering.

And in answer to their treble interjections  
The sun beats lightning on the waves,  
The waves fold thunder on the sand;  
And could they hear me I would tell them:

O brilliant kids, frisk with your dog,  
Fondle your shells and sticks, bleached  
By time and the elements; but there is a line  
You must not cross nor ever trust beyond it  
Spry cordage of your bodies to caresses  
Too lichen faithful from too wide a breast,  
The bottom of the sea is cruel.<sup>47</sup>

There is here the sharp contrast which is further developed in the later "Voyages" between the bright scene on the shore where the children are playing in the sand and the sun, warm and earthy symbols, clean and bright, and the nearness of the sea, tempting with its surge and power to the children playing on the beach, but a dark force, too, which would snatch them away, if it could, from this brilliance of life into the

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47. Hart Crane, The Collected Poems of Hart Crane, p. 101.

all-embracing death and anonymity which it represents. Weber calls it "an ambivalent force, alternately attracting and repelling with surges of maternal love and clutching death."<sup>48</sup> Although superficially it is attractive, caressing, soothing, at the bottom it is cruel, as death, or life, or love, is cruel, and one who becomes well-acquainted with it recognizes that there is a line between its kindness and its cruelty; it embraces and caresses all too eagerly, too all-inclusively, to be anything other than indifferent and impersonal, and indifference and impersonality are kinds of cruelty which Crane knew well. There is a note of wistfulness in Crane's addressing the children, for the implication is that they cannot hear him; he is aware of the distance that separates him from a happy childhood.

The major symbol of the "Voyages," then, is here introduced--the sea, with all its fascination, tremendous power, attraction, and all its cruelty, fearsomeness, treachery, and above all, its utter indifference to those it attracts or repels. It is the ideal symbol for either love or death, both forces which have those qualities, and perhaps because love meant to Crane an explosive cleansing, a submission to a vast, universal force which submerges personality, a force closely resembling death, they became linked in his mind, and

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48. Weber, op. cit., p. 106.

he chose the sea as the symbol of both.

"Voyages II" demonstrates his absorption with these qualities of the sea, its vastness, and uncontrolled power.

And yet this great wink of eternity,  
Of rimless floods, unfettered leewardings,  
Samite sheeted and processioned where  
Her undinal vast belly moonward bends,  
Laughing the wrapt inflections of our love;

Take this Sea, whose diapason knells  
On scrolls of silver snowy sentences,  
The sceptred terror of whose sessions rends  
As her demeanors motion well or ill,  
All but the pieties of lovers' hands.

Here it is--a "wink of eternity"; the sea seems linked here with all the symbols of coldness, unfeelingness, a vast, undirected, uncontrolled power, "rimless," "unfettered," bending toward the moon, another symbol of coldness, and laughing at the warmth of love. It is truly a power--a terrible, authoritative ("sceptred") power, delivering judgments ("demeanors motion well or ill"), and rending, destroying everything but love. And the connection of the sea with death is in "diapason knells," for diapason, in music, is the entire octave, and perhaps here could mean the whole of the sea, which "knells"--the signal of bad tidings or death. The relation of the sea with music, or bells, is significant, too, for both music and bells seem to mean some kind of unity for Crane, and he composed much of his poetry under the stimulus of music, the phonograph playing as he wrote, and yet the

sea and love cannot be separated, either, for the sea "laughs the inflections of love," and has not the power to separate lovers.

And onward, as bells off San Salvador  
Salute the crocus lustres of the stars,  
In these poinsettia meadows of her tides,--  
Adagios of islands, O my Prodigal,  
Complete the dark confessions her veins spell.

Mark how her turning shoulders wind the hours,  
And hasten while her penniless rich palms  
Pass superscription of bent foam and wave,--  
Hasten, while they are true,--sleep, death, desire,  
Close round one instant in one floating flower.

By simply using two words, "And onward," Crane is able to give the impression of a boat travelling over the sea; it reaches the tropical region of San Salvador, and the bells are heard in the towers of the sunken city off its coast. There is here another indication that bells or music and the sea have much in common--here the bells have been submerged in the sea. This same indication is in "adagios of islands," and of this phrase Crane wrote:

. . . When, in *Voyages* (II), I speak of "adagios of islands," the reference is to the motion of a boat through islands clustered thickly, the rhythm of the motion, etc. And it seems a much more direct and creative statement than any more logical employment of words such as "coasting slowly through the islands," besides ushering in a whole world of music.<sup>49</sup>

The use of flower imagery is effective in this third stanza,

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<sup>49</sup> Hart Crane, "General Aims and Theories," included in Horton, *op. cit.*, p. 327.

also, ("crocus lustres of the stars," "poinsettia meadows of her tides") especially when it is followed by the "one floating flower" of the fourth stanza.<sup>50</sup> In this fourth stanza the sea is seen as one who counts time ("winds the hours"), waiting to engulf everything, and the poet is urging haste while still on the surface ("superscription of bent foam and wave"), because everything--"sleep, death, desire"--can be swallowed in an instant by the sea as can a flower. Here, too, is further indication that the sea, as a unifying force, binds or is inextricably bound with, sleep, death, desire (lust) and the flower of love.

Bind us in time, O Seasons clear, and awe.  
 O minstrel galleons of Carib fire,  
 Bequeath us to no earthly shore until  
 Is answered in the vortex of our grave  
 The seal's wide spindrift gaze toward paradise.<sup>51</sup>

The final stanza is an exhortation by the poet to be found in time, (not eternity), by the seasons and their changes. But he is asking, too, not to be set ashore from this sea of song and flaming love ("minstrel galleons of

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50. The influence of Samuel Greenberg, a young poet who died leaving many incoherent poems in manuscript, which Crane perused, can be seen in some of the symbolism of the "Voyages," for Greenberg's poems were full of rainbows, waves, shadows and blossoms, and of the conflict between the spirit and flesh, love and lust. See Horton, op. cit., p. 175.

51. Hart Crane, The Collected Poems of Hart Crane, pp. 102-103.

Carib fire"), but rather to be drowned in it, to find his death in it--"vortex of our grave." Here again, love and death are united, and both are linked with the sea; and the "vortex of our grave" is strangely prescient of Crane's actual death.

"Voyages" III, IV, and V sound a much more personal note than does "Voyages II." While "Voyages II" is a celebration of love, the next three seem to be addressed especially to one person, and there is indication in them of the meetings and partings of lovers, perhaps references to the voyages which Crane's friend took from time to time during the period of their love affair. But there is more in the poems than biographical incident; they apply to the role of love in human experience. And still there is the sea, carrying all the symbolism noted before, and taking on wider possibilities of meaning and larger areas of experience with each poem, as can be seen from reading "Voyages III."

Infinite consanguinity it bears--  
 This tendered theme of you that light  
 Retrieves from sea plains where the sky  
 Resigns a breast that every wave enthrones:  
 While ribboned water lanes I wind  
 Are laved and scattered with no stroke  
 Wide from your side, whereto this hour  
 The sea lifts, also, reliquary hands.

And so, admitted through black swollen gates  
 That must arrest all distance otherwise,--  
 Past whirling pillars and lithe pediments,  
 Light wrestling there incessantly with light,  
 Star kissing star through wave on wave unto  
 Your body rocking!

and where death, if shed,

Presumes no carnage, but this single change,--  
 Upon the steep floor flung from dawn to dawn  
 The silken skilled transmemberment of song;

Permit me, voyage, love, into your hands...<sup>52</sup>

In the words "infinite consanguinity" there is still another indication of the unity of love and the sea, for the love song ("tendered theme of you") is "retrieved" from the sea, with which it is closely connected, and the poet is winding over the water lanes of the sea to his lover's side, while the sea is also worshipping the lover. Now the sea, besides being identified with love, has become in a sense identified with the lover, is personified in the sex imagery of the sky resigning a "breast that every wave enthrones," and of the sea lifting "reliquary hands" unto "your side," and particularly in the sexual imagery of the first six lines of the second stanza. Horace Gregory has stated:

To the psychiatrist, there is little doubt that his frequent use of sea imagery in his poetry has an obvious meaning in sexual pathology--but the more important fact is that Crane translated these associations into poetry.<sup>53</sup>

And here death is not something to be feared, but if it occurs, it "presumes no carnage," only the flinging of "skilled transmemberment of song"--the poem--throughout time as a memorial of love. Therefore, perhaps, "death" could be

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52. Ibid., p. 104.

53. Horace Gregory and Marya Zaturenska, "Hart Crane: Death and the Sea," A History of American Poetry, 1900-1940, p. 470.

substituted for "love" in the final line of the poem, lending additional depth to its meaning.

"Voyages IV" is a much more difficult poem, both from the standpoint of symbolism and that of syntax. When Horton says that Crane intended many poems

. . . not as descriptions of experience that could be read about, but as immediate experiences that the reader could have, very much like the ones he might have (also without benefit of rational explanation or description) in the sensitive subliminal interiors of his own consciousness . . . .<sup>54</sup>

he is speaking of one of the tenets of the Symbolist movement which would be particularly applicable to a poem like "Voyages IV." For that reason it would be best to look at the poem as a whole to see what kind of experience can be derived from it, remembering, of course, that the experience of the reader may vary, depending upon what he brings to the poem.

Whose counted smile of hours and days, suppose  
I know as spectrum of the sea and pledge  
Vastly now parting gulf on gulf of wings  
Whose circles bridge, I know, (from palms to the severe  
Chilled albatross's white immutability)  
No stream of greater love advancing now  
Than, singing, this mortality alone  
Through clay aflow immortally to you.

All fragrance irrefragibly, and claim  
Madly meeting logically in this hour  
And region that is ours to wreath again,  
Portending eyes and lips and making told  
The chancel port and portion of our June--

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54. Horton, op. cit., p. 178.



Shall they not stem and close in our own steps  
 Bright staves of flowers and quills to-day as I  
 Must first be lost in fatal tides to tell?  
 In signature of the incarnate word  
 The harbor shoulders to resign in mingling  
 Mutual blood, transpiring as foreknown  
 And widening noon within your breast for gathering  
 All bright insinuations that my years have caught  
 For islands where must lead inviolably  
 Blue latitudes and levels of your eyes,--

In this expectant, still exclaim receive  
 The secret oar and petals of all love.<sup>55</sup>

If one attempts to achieve a logical grammatical connection of all the phrases in the poem (and it is probably not impossible to do so), he may lose much of what Crane has called, referring to "Possessions," an "organic impact on the imagination." Instead, a study of the symbols to determine what connection exists between them may be much more rewarding.

The poet is evidently addressing "you"--the lover, whose "counted smile of hours and days" (limited, or precious moments of love) he knows both as the "spectrum" (a series of radiant energies, or probably, a rainbow) of the sea, and as a pledge (perhaps the poem), which part the gulfs of wings ( of time and space) whose "circles" bridge the vast expanse of the sea, which is no greater than the stream of love that is in the mortality, or body, of the poet, and is flowing through the poet as he comes singing (or sends the poem as

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55. Hart Crane, The Collected Poems of Hart Crane, pp. 105-6.

his song of love) to his lover. The parenthesis in the stanza clearly shows the unity Crane was seeking between two themes, for many of the symbols are here; the "wings" of time and space are "bridging" (symbol of unity) the distance from "palms" (symbol of warmth) to the "severe chilled albatross's white immutability" (symbols of coldness or indifference).

"Fragrance" and "claim" look back to and seem to parallel "spectrum" and "pledge," even as they look ahead to "flowers and quills" and "oar and petals." The second stanza seems to refer to the meeting again of lovers after separation, and the anticipation of joys and of entering once more the warmth of love ("chancel port and portion of our June"). But these moments will be lost (again there is the image of the flower of love being engulfed in the sea), even as the poet must be lost in the "fatal tides" of love to speak of it. (Again the sea and death and love are joined.) But in this sea he does find the warmth of love ("mingling mutual blood" and "widening noon within your breast") in the "islands" or refuges to which his lover's eyes lead him. The final stanza is a request for the lover to receive the poem, the "oar" by means of which the poet is making his way over the sea to his lover, and also, in a sense, the flower (petals") or product of the poet's love.

This is a broad interpretation which ignores, in a way, the logical connection between words, but it must be

remembered that Crane wrote concerning the form:

. . . the motivation of the poem must be derived from the implicit emotional dynamics of the materials used, and the terms of expression employed are often selected less for their logical (literal) significance than for their associational meanings. Via this and their metaphorical inter-relationships, the entire construction of the poem is raised on the organic principle of a "logic of metaphor," which antedates our so-called pure logic, and which is the genetic basis of all speech, hence consciousness and thought-extension.<sup>56</sup>

So all that can be attempted, actually, is to point to possible meanings of certain symbols, and leave the impact of the poem as a whole to the imagination of the reader, who may, of course, find other possible interpretations of certain of the phrases.

"Voyages V" appears to be an expression of the poet's feeling as he is about to be separated from his lover, who is going out to sea. They are awakened in the dead of night by a sense of the loneliness that is overtaking them in their pending separation.

Meticulous, past midnight in clear rims,  
Infrangible and lonely, smooth as though cast  
Together in one merciless white blade--  
The bay estuaries flock the hard sky limits.

--As if too brittle or too clear to touch!  
The cables of our sleep so swiftly filed,  
Already hang, shred ends from remembered stars.  
One frozen trackless smile...What words  
Can strangle this deaf moonlight? For we

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56. Hart Crane, "General Aims and Theories," included in Horton, op. cit., Appendix I, p. 327.

Are overtaken. Now no cry, no sword  
 Can fasten or deflect this tidal wedge,  
 Slow tyranny of moonlight, moonlight loved  
 And changed..."There's

Nothing like this in the world," you say,  
 Knowing I cannot touch your hand and look  
 Too, into that godless cleft of sky  
 Where nothing turns but dead sands flashing.

"--And never to quite understand!" No,  
 In all the argosy of your bright hair I dreamed  
 Nothing so flagless as this piracy.

But now  
 Draw in your head, alone and too tall here.  
 Your eyes already in the slant of drifting foam;  
 Your breath sealed by the ghosts I do not know;  
 Draw in your head and sleep the long way home.<sup>57</sup>

The bay estuaries are "lonely" and "merciless white blades" because they represent the taking-off point from land to sea, and hence the separation of lovers; they are "too brittle," too hard, to be touched by mercy. The moonlight, too, is a symbol of loneliness, deaf to their pleas. It represents coldness, alienation ("one frozen trackless smile") as opposed to the warmth of love, and its tyranny is that it can be loved by lovers and yet change into something that is cold and unsympathetic. The sea, here, is cruel too, showing the other side of its dual nature, for it is the "tidal wedge" which is coming between the lovers. The poet cannot bear to touch his lover's hand and look into the lonely moonlit sky ("dead sands flashing"); and he

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57. Hart Crane, The Collected Poems of Hart Crane, pp. 107-8.

cannot understand the piracy of the sea which is taking his lover away, but he can offer one word in consolation--to make the most of the time that is left, and not to be already in spirit on the sea, whose coldness and cruelty is in "drifting foam," which is white, and "ghosts," which are also white. The poem is full of the poignancy which all lovers feel upon separation, the feeling of urgency, and the desire to treasure each moment that is left.

"Voyages VI" is the expression of the poet's loneliness and longing after being separated from his lover, and his thoughts are with his love sailing over strange and unfriendly seas. He writes the poem as compensation, for it can hold the moments of love, and cannot leave him ("Whose accent no farewell can know"). He imagines himself wandering over the sea seeking his lover ("the derelict and blinded guest"), but the waves of the sea rear savagely and he does not know whether "Belle Isle"--the refuge which he is seeking--is love, "before which rainbows twine continual hair" or death, the "loured goddess" whose eyes "smile unsearchable repose." He finally comes to believe it is the poem, which will hold love ("Hushed willows anchored in its glow"), and is unbetrayable.

Where icy and bright dungeons lift  
Of swimmers their lost morning eyes,  
And ocean rivers, churching, shift  
Green borders under stranger skies,

Steadily as a shell secretes  
 Its beating leagues of monotone,  
 Or as many waters through the sun's  
 Red kelson past the cape's wet stone;

Here again is an echo of what has been noted before--the light of the sun (life) being extinguished in the waters of the sea (death)--the underlying theme of many of the poems and an indication of a wish for death, subdued, but occasionally revealing itself.

O rivens mingling toward the sky  
 And harbor of the phoenix' breast--  
 My eyes pressed black against the prow,  
 --Thy derelict and blinded guest.

Waiting, afire, what name, unspoke,  
 I cannot claim: let thy waves rear  
 More savage than the death of kings,  
 Some splintered garland for the seer.

There is a suggestion here that the poet is aflame with love, but that the dark waters are rearing up to extinguish that flame in death. There is in these stanzas, too, an echo of "The Ancient Mariner."

Beyond siroccos harvesting  
 The solstice thunders, crept away,  
 Like a cliff swinging or a sail  
 Flung into April's inmost day--

Creation's blithe and petalled word  
 To the lounged goddess when she rose  
 Conceding dialogue with eyes  
 That smile unsearchable repose--

Still fervid covenant, Belle Isle,  
 --Unfolded floating dais before  
 Which rainbows twine continual hair--  
 Belle Isle, white echo of the oar!

The storm of the sea abates, however, and he finds the peace-

ful isle, which may be a floating fervid covenant of love, or perhaps the poem as his share in that covenant:

The imaged Word, it is, that holds  
Hushed willows anchored in its glow.  
It is the unbetrayable reply  
Whose accent no farewell can know.<sup>58</sup>

The islands which are scattered throughout the "Voyages"--the "adagios of islands" of "Voyages II," the "islands" of "Voyages IV" and "Belle Isle" of "Voyages VI"--all seem to symbolize for Crane some sort of refuge, appearing out of the limitless expanse of the sea, to which he can cling, so that he will not be drawn irresistibly under the spell of the sea and engulfed in it. These islands look forward to the last section of The Bridge, "Atlantis," the goal toward which he is working in that poem, both for himself and for the America of the future. "Atlantis," too, is an island--a beautiful flower of an island--set somewhere in the sea. More than anything else, then, the islands might represent hope--the hope that Crane kept reiterating, to convince himself as much as anyone else, that sometime, someplace, there existed for him a bright future.

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58. Hart Crane, The Collected Poems of Hart Crane, pp. 109-10.

### CHAPTER III

#### "FOR THE MARRIAGE OF FAUSTUS AND HELEN"

Although it was written before "Voyages" and some of the other poems in White Buildings, "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen" forms an excellent transition from the mood of White Buildings to that of The Bridge. It was in 1923, shortly after Crane had finished this poem, that he conceived the idea of The Bridge, which was to synthesize all the diverse elements of modern American civilization--its cities, its broad prairies, its natural beauty and its machines, its past, present, and future--into a beautiful unity. "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen," then, serves as a kind of prelude to The Bridge, for it was in this poem that Crane first attempted to achieve a synthesis--more specifically, to find a place for abstract beauty and for art in the modern world. It was his first attempt, as he states, to build a "bridge."

It is therefore one of the key poems in reaching an understanding of Crane's symbolism and his attitudes concerning poetry. Although Crane went to some length to explain the poem, and although, once the major symbols are understood, the poem should offer little difficulty, some of the criticism of the poem has led more to confusion than to clarity. If, however, one remembers Crane's intentions in



writing "Faustus and Helen," and if he considers the symbols of the poem in the light of other symbols Crane has used, he need not go far astray.

. . . Arranged in three parts, which he conceived as spanning a rising scale from the "quotidian to the universal," this work was his first attempt to deal with the major problems of poetry. The parts as he described them were colorless abstractions: first, "Meditation, Evocation, Love, Beauty"; second, "Dance, Humor, Satisfaction"; and third, "Tragedy, War (the eternal soldier), Résumé, Ecstasy, Final Declaration." But the symbolism he chose provided a concrete, even a dramatic, framework. Once it is known that Helen is "the symbol of this abstract 'sense of beauty'--Faustus the symbol of myself, the poetic or imaginative man of all times," the action of the poem and its philosophical implications become perfectly apparent. Crane imagined the poem as a kind of prothalamion celebrating his pursuit and capture of the Platonic idea of beauty, and at the same time defining his relation not only to his art, but also to the world in which he was living and to the world of tradition in which beauty had sometimes lived as a vital principle.<sup>59</sup>

As shall be shown in the discussion of the poem, the three parts as described by Crane could be said to roughly equal the opposing themes of White Buildings and the final uniting of them: love and beauty as opposed to lust and degradation are, after war or catharsis, joined. In the essay entitled "General Aims and Theories," written in 1925, more than two years after he had conceived and written "Faustus and Helen," Crane described his intentions in writing the poem.

When I started writing Faustus & Helen, it was my intention to embody in modern terms (words, symbols,

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59. Philip Horton, Hart Crane: The Life of an American Poet, pp. 119-20.

metaphors) a contemporary approximation to an ancient human culture or mythology that seems to have been obscured rather than illumined with the frequency of poetic allusions made to it during the last century. . . . The real evocation of this (to me) very real and absolute conception of beauty seemed to consist in a reconstruction in these modern terms of the basic emotional attitude toward beauty that the Greeks had. And in so doing I found that I was really building a bridge between so-called classic experience and many divergent realities of our seething, confused cosmos of today, which has no formulated mythology yet for classic poetic reference or for religious exploitation.

So I found "Helen" sitting in a street car; the Dionysion revels of her court and her seduction were transferred to a Metropolitan roof garden with a jazz orchestra; and the katharsis of the fall of Troy I saw approximated in the recent World War. The importance of this scaffolding may easily be exaggerated, but it gave me a series of correspondences between two widely separated worlds on which to sound some major themes of human speculation--love, beauty, death, renaissance . . .<sup>60</sup>

So here, as elsewhere, is the duality of life which tears at Crane, and again he is attempting to find some kind of unity--"correspondences" between the world of beauty of the past and the modern commercial world, which the poet, as mediator, is trying to achieve. The symbolism is more clear cut than it is in some of the other poems, for after Crane explains that Helen does represent an "abstract sense of beauty" and that Faustus is the poet searching for her in the noisy whirl of modern civilization, the minor symbols give less difficulty, as some of the lines of the first section will show.

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60. Hart Crane, "General Aims and Theories," included in Horton, op. cit., pp. 323-24.

The mind has shown itself at times  
 Too much the baked and labeled dough  
 Divided by accepted multitudes.  
 Across the stacked partitions of the day--  
 Across the memoranda, baseball scores,  
 The stenographic smiles and stock quotations  
 Smutty wings flash out equivocations.

The mind is brushed by sparrow wings;  
 Numbers, rebuffed by asphalt, crowd  
 The margins of the day, accent the curbs,  
 Convoying divers dawns on every corner  
 To druggist, barber and tobaccoist,  
 Until the graduate opacities of evening  
 Take them away as suddenly to somewhere  
 Virginal perhaps, less fragmentary, cool.

Here the mind, "divided" or scattered into fragments by the many little things that make up a business day, is brushed occasionally by flashes of imagination ("sparrow wings"), until the evening comes to take away the druggist, barber, and tobaccoist--the petty business people--to a place, perhaps in the country, which has more unity, is "less fragmentary."

There is the world dimensional for  
those untwisted by the love of things  
irreconcilable...

If these lines serve no other purpose, they are an affirmation of the duality that Crane constantly feels-- he is twisted by a love of things irreconcilable, here probably first of all by his love for the beauty of nature, and beauty in the abstract, and the feeling he has for the power, for the spirit, of modern civilization. But he continues to try to reconcile these things, and tries to evoke beauty,

to find "Helen," in something whose existence is at the center of modern civilization--the streetcar.

And yet, suppose some evening I forgot  
The fare and transfer, yet got by that way  
Without recall---lost yet poised in traffic.  
Then I might find your eyes across an aisle,  
Still flickering with those prefigurations--  
Prodigal, yet uncontested now,  
Half-riant before the jerky window frame.

There is some way, I think, to touch  
Those hands of yours that count the nights  
Stippled with pink and green advertisements.  
And now, before its arteries turn dark,  
I would have you meet this bartered blood.  
Imminent in his dream, none better knows  
The white wafer cheek of love, or offers words  
Lightly as moonlight on the eaves meets snow.

The "you" is Helen, the sense of beauty, and the poet is seeking a way to find her in the modern world of the city and industry, of busy-ness and materialism. And he is introducing himself to her as one who, although he is a part of modern life (his blood has been "bartered" or sold), knows the delicacy of the feeling of love and feels that he can express it ("offers words") in poetic terms.

Reflective conversion of all things  
At your deep blush, when ecstasies thread  
The limbs and belly, when rainbows spread  
Impinging on the throat and sides...  
Inevitable, the body of the world  
Keeps in inventive dust for the hiatus  
That winks above it, bluet in your breasts.

"Blush," "ecstasies threading the limbs and belly", and "rainbows" spreading are love symbols, and since Helen symbolizes beauty, these would symbolize the beauty of love, or

the love of beauty, for which the body of the world weeps,  
because of its lacking ("hiatus") in the present world.

The earth may glide diaphanous to death;  
But if I lift my arms it is to bend  
To you who turned away once, Helen, knowing  
The press of troubled hands, too alternate  
With steel and soil to hold you endlessly.  
I meet you, therefore, in that eventual flame  
You found in final chains, no captive then--  
Beyond their million brittle, bloodshot eyes;  
White, through white cities passed on to assume  
That world which comes to each of us alone.

Accept a lone eye riveted to your plane,  
Bent axle of devotion along companion ways  
That beat, continuous, to hourless days--  
One inconspicuous, glowing orb or praise.

The earth may die, but the poet's only gesture will be toward that sense of beauty which he has found; he cares not what happens to the earth, because Helen has turned away from the modern world with its steel and soil--it cannot hold her. He will find her in that world "which comes to each of us alone," after the cleansing of that eventual flame (if it is death, it is consuming, flaming, cleansing--death in love, perhaps) when they have passed beyond the white cities (both white and the city are symbols of coldness to Crane, and the city especially stands for the cold neglect of the modern world for beauty and love), with their million brittle (unfeeling), bloodshot eyes, to a unity of the poet of imagination with beauty. The lines are also a reference to the burning of the "white city" of Troy, whereby Helen, through flame, achieved purity and

freedom.

Of this first section of the poem Eda Lou Walton writes:

The poem uses the image of Faust as a symbol of the modern scientific or skeptical mind. The image of Helen represents modern civilization as typified by a large city, probably New York. Helen (the metropolitan city) is wooed by Faustus (skeptical modern man). The poem opens with a statement of the confusion in our daily life. With the line "there is a world dimensional. . ." (l. 16) the poet states his faith that even for the modern man or poet there can be a synthesis of values. The poem goes on then recording images of a poet's awareness of city beauty, and the first section closes with a declaration of the poet's love for the metropolis.<sup>61</sup>

Here is another illustration of the different interpretations that a poem which employs symbols may have. However, this identification of Helen with the city does not appear to have much validity in view of Crane's stated intention in writing the poem, and in view of his attitude toward the city as expressed in some of the other poems in White Buildings. It is, however, an altogether possible interpretation for someone to make who was not familiar with the essay in which Crane states that Helen is the symbol of an abstract sense of beauty. That that would seem to be the case here is borne out by the fact that--a minor point--Crane was living

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61. George K. Anderson and Eda Lou Walton, This Generation; A Selection of British and American Literature from 1914 to the Present with Historical and Critical Essays, p. 601.

in Cleveland and not New York at the time he wrote the poem.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, Crane did not think of himself as "modern, scientific man," so much as the poet and the poetic spirit of all times, the mediator between past and present, Helen and the city, and in Miss Walton's interpretation there is a confusion of the terms "modern man" and the "poet." Of course, as stated before, one of the basic dualisms in Crane was that he felt that the climate of modern civilization was unsympathetic to the poet, and at the same time he felt himself to be in a sense the poet and prophet of the machine age. In one essay he wrote that

The function of poetry in a Machine Age is identical to its function in any other age; and its capacities for presenting the most complete synthesis of human values remain essentially immune from any of the so-called inroads of science. The emotional stimulus of machinery is on an entirely different psychic plane from that of poetry.<sup>63</sup>

He went on to state that while poetry can absorb the machine, the machine does not have the power to basically alter poetry. In the light of all this, it is of course possible that there was some confusion in Crane's mind, despite his stated intention, about what his symbols really represented.

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62. He finished the poem in January, 1923, and moved to New York in March of that year. See Brom Weber, Hart Crane; A Biographical and Critical Study, pp. 179, 195.

63. Hart Crane, "Modern Poetry," The Collected Poems of Hart Crane, p. 177.

The second section of the poem pictures "the Dionysian revels" of Helen's court transferred to a "Metropolitan roof garden with a jazz orchestra." Weber writes of this section:

The poet returns in Part II from the supernal world, the "plane" on which abstract beauty can be experienced, to the "quotidian" world of twentieth-century life. Beauty is now seen in its earthly form, the lowest manifestation of its perfection. The poet reacts to it with lust, the antithesis of the devotion expressed in Part I.<sup>64</sup>

A glance at the lines will show that this is true--here the other side of the poet's dual nature is seen in the brazen fall of beauty to static sterility.

Brazen hypnotics glitter here;  
Glee shifts from foot to foot;  
Magnetic to their tremolo,  
This crashing opera bouffe,  
Blest excursion! this ricochet  
From roof to roof--  
Know, Olympians, we are breathless  
While nigger cupids scour the stars!

A thousand light shrugs balance us  
Through snarling hails of melody.  
White shadows slip across the floor  
Splayed like cards from a loose hand;  
Rhythmic ellipses lead into centers  
Until somewhere a rooster banters.

Greet naively--yet intrepidly  
New soothings, new amazements  
That cornets introduce at every turn--  
And you may fall downstairs with me  
With perfect grace and equanimity.  
Or, plaintively scud past shores  
Where, by strange harmonic laws  
All relatives, serene and cool,  
Sit rocked in patent armchairs.

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64. Weber, op. cit., p. 182.



O, I have known metallic paradises  
 Where cuckoos clucked to finches  
 Above the deft catastrophes of drums.  
 While titters hailed the groans of death  
 Beneath gyrating awnings I have seen  
 The incunabula of the divine grotesque.  
 This music has a reassuring way.

The siren of the springs of guilty song--  
 Let us take her on the incandescent wax  
 Striated with nuances, nervosities  
 That we are heir to: she is still so young  
 We cannot frown upon her as she smiles,  
 Dipping here in this cultivated storm  
 Among slim skaters of the gardened skies.

The major symbolism is in the poem as a whole more than in any particular line or lines. Here beauty is degraded in the jazz tempo of the modern age, in much the same way that it had been degraded in the time of Helen. This theme is repeated in the poet's wanting the "Olympians" to know that "we" (in the sense of modern man) have the same kinds of experiences that they had, while the "nigger cupids" (Negro dance band) play the accompaniment. Melody is no longer beautiful, but "snarling;" looseness and abandon are in the line "Splayed like cards from a loose hand;" the degradation of beauty ("falling downstairs") is, however, accepted "with perfect grace and equanimity" because the modern world, in its blatant materialism, is unable to feel the tragedy of that fall. In the fourth stanza there seems to be a contrast between the melody ("cuckoos and finches"), which is pleasant ("paradise"), and the rhythm, which is not ("deft catastrophes of drums"). And as death loses its dignity, the "divine"

(abstract beauty) becomes grotesque. But the poet is reconciled to it--"This music has a reassuring way." In the final stanza Helen has become a siren whom the poet desires, but concerning whom he feels guilt; he cannot, however, bring himself to frown upon her in her degradation.

Weber has noted the dualism expressed in this section in this way:

The "I" in this section performs in two roles. As poet, he observes the desecration of beauty by modern man. As modern man, he is the ravisher and defamer of beauty. This conflict between desire and understanding is the high point of the section, for wantonness leads to "metallic paradises" and "the divine grotesque."<sup>65</sup>

This correlates with the statement made earlier concerning Crane's feeling about modern America and his position in America. Although he finds much that is hopeless and unsympathetic in the industrial age, he must recognize that he is a part of it. One of the chief points of this section seems to be, then, that this modern blase attitude, which makes modern man unable to appreciate absolute beauty, or to feel true remorse over the degradation of beauty, is not really new, but one aspect of an ancient duality--the process of life by which love turns to lust, warmth to cold, creativity to decay, civilization to corruption. The industrial or factory system is only the form that this old antithesis takes in the modern age. But in the age of Helen, too, the fall of

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65. Weber, loc. cit.



intricate slain numbers that arise in whispers" may be the poets of other times ("naked of steel"), whose voices come into the industrial age only as whispers, or they may be those soldiers who have not survived the destruction, for whom "the religious gunman" is the "ambassador," Even he cannot survive long, and his fall will not be by chance ("as the wind settles"). Now is the time for catharsis, and the end of fear and pity.

We even,  
 Who drove speediest destruction  
 In corymbulous formations of mechanics,--  
 Who hurried the hill breezes, spouting malice  
 Plangent over meadows, and looked down  
 On rifts of torn and empty houses  
 Like old women with teeth unjubilant  
 That waited faintly, briefly and in vain:

We know, eternal gunman, our flesh remembers  
 The tensile boughs, the nimble blue plateaus,  
 The mounted, yielding cities of the air!  
 That saddled sky that shook down vertical  
 Repeated play of fire--no hypogeum  
 Of wave or rock was good against one hour.

There is here first of all reference to the world war, and the young aviators that took part in the destruction, and there is striking imagery in this description: "nimble blue plateaus," "mounted, yielding cities of the air," "saddled sky." But there is more than this; here is the catharsis, the "repeated play of fire," from which nothing could escape--destruction came to meadows and city "rifts of houses") alike. And there may be a suggestion, too, of the burning of Troy--and of fire as the eternal cleansing agent.

We did not ask for that, but have survived,  
 And will persist to speak again before  
 All stubble streets that have not curved  
 To memory, or known the ominous lifted arm  
 That lowers down the arc of Helen's brow  
 To saturate with blessing and dismay.

The "we" is probably the poet and the soldier of the opening joined here as a generation of survivors, who did not ask for the war, or the catharsis (the poet had been "satisfied" in Part II by the fall of Helen), but have survived it, and who still live to speak as poets before the "stubble streets" --"stubble" the symbol of what remains of the past (glories before the grain was out)--that have not "curved to memory"--that have not been bent by the memory of the catharsis, and so survive--or known the "ominous lifted arm"--progress, or the arm of the bombardier, that is descending to crush out beauty--Helen's brow--and bring both blessing and dismay. Here is the duality again; modern civilization has blessings, but it also brings sorrow. Here is the renaissance, the rebirth of hope for beauty in the world that comes as destruction, a cleansing fire, as it has been known classically and as the poet shall continue to make it known in the world in which he is living.<sup>66</sup> The classical reference is that after

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66. Another explanation of these first stanzas of Part III, interesting both in itself and because it reveals how subject poetry of this sort is to varied interpretations, is given by Miss Walton:

Now in section three he [Crane] addresses his companion, Gorham Munson, a conservative critic with whom Crane was

the burning of Troy, Helen went home to Greece, restored to her rightful place. The final three stanzas are an affirmation of this hopeful rebirth.

A goose, tobacco and cologne--  
 Three-winged and gold-shod prophecies of heaven,  
 The lavish heart shall always have to leaven  
 And spread with bells and voices, and atone  
 The abating shadows of our conscript dust.

This stanza must mean that the "goose, tobacco, and cologne" are the "three winged" and "gold-shod" prophecies of heaven. "Three winged" may refer to the three things which make possible the leavening: the goose quill or pen as the symbol of poetry, tobacco or smoking as a symbol of sensual pleasure,

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staying. "Capped arbiter" is a direct reference to the academic cap, typical of such scholars. The critic is pictured as shooting down other writers as he himself will in time be, figuratively speaking, killed. He is the religious gunman who arrives home at dawn with the poet. He is called religious because he, as a humanist, slays for what he considers an ideal the less moralistic poets of the younger generation. Anderson and Walton, op. cit., p. 602.

This explanation, although it certainly may have validity in that the stanzas may refer to the poets of the younger generation being "shot down"--severely mocked--by the more conservative older critics, loses much of its acceptability by being applied to Munson. Munson was a warm friend of Crane from the time they met, and it was he who was visiting Crane at the time Crane was writing part of the poem. (See Horton, Op. cit., p. 136). Furthermore, Munson, far from being a conservative critic, was one who was in full sympathy with the newest ideas concerning poetry and art, and was an editor of Secession, one of the most radical (from the point of view of art) of the little magazines of the time. Although a controversy did arise among the younger writers of the period, in which both Crane and Munson were involved, it occurred over a year after the completion of this poem. See Weber, op. cit., pp. 213-45.

and cologne as a symbol of aesthetic enjoyment. With these things the "lavish heart" of the poet will have to lighten life always--that has been the function of warmth, love and emotion as expressed by poets throughout history, and it shall be their function in the future. "Bells" seem to be a symbol of unity with Crane, and "voices" may mean the voice of poetry atoning for the shadows or sorrows of earthly existence. The following stanza shows how the renewal may be accomplished.

Anchises' navel, dripping of the sea,--  
 The hands Erasmus dipped in the gleaming tides,  
 Gather the voltage of blown blood and vine;  
 Delve upward for the new and scattered wine,  
 O brother-thief of time, that we recall.  
 Laugh out the meager penance of their days  
 Who dare not share with us the breath released,  
 The substance drilled and spent beyond repair  
 For golden, or the shadow of gold hair.

Miss Walton sheds some light on Crane's use of classical and historical reference in the first two lines:

Anchises, the father of Aeneas by Venus. He was carried from burning Troy out into the sea on his son's shoulders. Crane uses the reference as an indication of the glory of Greek civilization carried into Rome. Erasmus, Dutch philosopher and scholar (1466?-1535). Crane uses him as a figure to symbolize the beginning of the Renaissance. He was one of the scholars who crossed the sea and brought culture to England. In other words, both Anchises and Erasmus symbolize the spread of art into new fields. .67

Anchises and Erasmus, then, gathered the "voltage" (power) of the "blown" (scattered) "blood and vine"--symbols of life and

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67. Anderson and Walton, op. cit., p. 603.

warmth, and here, art. The next lines are a challenge to himself as poet to search for the scattered (scattered by the impact of the modern age) and new (newly affirmed) wine--symbol of warmth, of Helen (love and beauty), and perhaps here of art, since art and wine are traditionally linked--"that we recall"--the poetic tradition is still remembered and can be renewed. The last lines of the stanza are a mocking of those who are afraid to make this affirmation. "The breath released" and "the substance spent" may be references to the release found in the writing of poetry, and this affirmation is made for love, if "gold hair" is, as it seems to be, a symbol of love. "Gold" looks backward, too, to "gold-shod" in the previous stanza.

Those "who dare not share," etc., may be a reference to T. S. Eliot; whose "Waste Land" was published in November, 1922, about three months before Crane finished "Faustus and Helen." What Crane wrote concerning Eliot's work would seem to bear this out.

There is no one writing in English who can command so much respect, to my mind, as Eliot. However, I take Eliot as a point of departure towards an almost complete reverse of direction. His pessimism is amply justified, in his own case. But I would apply as much of his erudition and technique as I can absorb and assemble towards a more positive, or . . . ecstatic goal. . . I feel that Eliot ignores certain spiritual events and possibilities as real and powerful now as, say, in the time of Blake. Certainly the man has dug the ground and buried hope as deep and direfully as it can ever be done. . . . After this perfection of death--nothing is possible in motion but a resurrection of some kind. Or else, as everyone persists



in announcing in the deep and dirgeful Dial, the fruits of civilization are entirely harvested. . . . Now is the time for humor, and the Dance of Death! All I know through very much suffering and dullness. . . is that it interests me to still affirm certain things. That will be the persisting theme of the last part of "F&H" as it has been all along.<sup>68</sup>

In the light of this statement "the meager penance of their days" would seem almost certainly to apply to Eliot and the other poets of negation.

Distinctly praise the years, whose volatile  
Blamed bleeding hands extend and thresh the height  
the imagination spans beyond despair,  
Outpacing bargain, vocable and prayer.<sup>69</sup>

These concluding lines of Part III praise both the traditional years of poetry, and the years of the future, which, though they may be wounded (bleeding) by indifference, still reach for the heights. The poetic imagination can span beyond despair to the height of hope, outpacing bargain (a commercial symbol and a symbol of compromise), vocable (anything that can be said, or meaningless words,) and even prayer.

So the poem ends on a note of positive hope--a sincere belief on Crane's part that there is a place for poetry, and that all the elements of life, diverse as they are, can be synthesized through a thorough purging of the spirit of man, and that this synthesis will result in a re-evaluation of the

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68. Quoted by Horton, op. cit., pp. 121-22.

69. Hart Crane, The Collected Poems of Hart Crane, pp. 93-99.

position of art and poetry in the lives of men. It was in this mood and with this belief that Crane conceived The Bridge, which was to link modern life with absolute truth, even as "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen" was an attempt to link modern experience with the classic conception of beauty. The mood of discouragement, of pessimism, reflected in some of the "Voyages" and the later sections of The Bridge, was to come later.

## CHAPTER IV

### FROM WHITE BUILDINGS TO THE BRIDGE

The symbols whose use by Crane has been examined in several of the poems in White Buildings point to some basic dualisms lying beneath the themes about which he wrote. The theme of coldness, alienation, or separation, symbolized by the moon, whiteness, and city, male sex images, winter, ice, snow, eternity, and sterility, seems to mean several things to Crane. It stands for the indifference of modern civilization--civilization in the sense of the Machine Age--to the position of the poet, and all that the poet stands for: culture, fine feelings, love, beauty, kindness and warmth. It stands for the cold rationality of the intellect separated from love and emotion. It seems to represent the power of lust, which is cold and sterile, lacking the warmth of feeling and trust that characterizes love. It is the city bereft of beauty; it is that which is frozen or metallic, fixed and unmoving. Finally, it stands for the finality of death.

The theme of "warmth," symbolized by the sun, noon, blood, wine, redness, fire, summer, and female sex symbols, also means a number of things to Crane. First of all, of course, it stands for the emotion of love, love which is passionate but not lustful, kind, generous and fertile. And it is life--vigorous, earthy life in blood streaming through

the veins of the body and rivers streaming through the body of the earth, bringing life as the sun brings life. It seems to stand for the flux of life, birth and death and rebirth, the temporal quality of life, the warmth and conviviality of friendship, optimism and faith in the future, rural warmth opposing city coldness.

[All these dualisms are at work in Crane, and he constantly attempts to reconcile them. He attempts it in several ways--in a spiritual love, an almost mystical love for beauty; or in love which overcomes lust and so acts as a unifying force between body and spirit. Sometimes he thinks that it is music, which can make a harmonic whole of all its parts; but most of all he thinks of it as the sea, which contains many of the dualisms: it is kind, but it is cruel; it is maternal, but it brings death; it has motion, but only within itself; and it unites all these qualities into an all-engulfing whole, which can be love, or which can be death. Of all his symbols, it is the sea which seems to grip Crane most, and it is that aspect of the sea which brings extinction--the swallowing up of the poet in its dark waters, the explosion which brings a finality of death or love or sexual escape, even as the life-giving sun is exploded in the sea--which predominates in its attraction for him. There seems to be, especially in the "Voyages," a not-so-tacit expression of coveting this extinction, and a definite leaning to this

more negative aspect of the dualism that possessed Crane. He fought against it, however, constantly attempting to affirm his faith in the modern world, and in Whitman's vision of the greatness of the American future, and seeking to find a positive place for himself in that society. His most prodigious effort to do so was The Bridge.

Even as "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen" was to span the gap between classic or absolute beauty and modern experience, and to synthesize beauty into modern life, The Bridge was to span and unite many things. It was to unite the great past of America with the present scientific age, and the scientific age with a vision of future greatness, in which the tradition of the past and the machine of the present should be fused into a great utopia both of the mind and of reality--"Atlantis," or Cathay, in the sense of what Cathay meant to Columbus--a promise of greatness and wealth and wisdom to be found in new horizons. It was to link the materialistic world of the machine age and the world of the spirit, by taking what was beautiful and good in the machine age and making it a part of the world of the spirit as exemplified by poetry.

"For," Crane wrote in 1929, "unless poetry can absorb the machine, i.e., acclimatize it as naturally and casually as trees, cattle, galleons, castles and all other human associations of the past, then poetry has failed of its

full contemporary function."<sup>70</sup>

And not least important, it was to be for Crane a unifying symbol--a symbol of life in all its manifestations and levels--streaming, vigorous, positive, earthy life--and a symbol of his rejection of unity with and immersion in the sea and death. As such, it was a "bridge" which would link him with the American heritage and future, and across which he could walk to find a place in modern society, as a poet and prophet of the modern world.

There is an implication, too, that the "bridge" was an escape--something which would lift him above the sea to a safe, dry place, where the fearsomeness of the sea as it appears in the "Voyages" would not be so close. It is as if he had been frightened by the sea and scurried back to solid earth. There is throughout Crane's work a wavering between these two kinds of syntheses for his dualisms: the broad, panoramic sweep of the future, optimism, utopianism, faith in the American dream, and the sea, ancient, mysterious, connoting sex, death, and the past. As is known, he personally was unsuccessful in achieving unity with life, and, whether fortunately or unfortunately, Crane the poet cannot be divorced from Crane the man.

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70. Hart Crane, "Modern Poetry," The Collected Poems of Hart Crane, p. 177.

## CHAPTER V

### SYMBOLISM IN THE BRIDGE

One of the great advantages in reading The Bridge after a study of the poems in White Buildings is that the language of The Bridge is not only more universal; it is less concentrated. When writing The Bridge, Crane was writing more in the tradition of Whitman than in the tradition of Rimbaud and the other Symbolists, and while it is not the purpose of this paper to enter into any more discussion of technique than is necessary, it is interesting to speculate that, as well as receiving his inspiration from Whitman for the content of The Bridge, Crane employed, to a limited extent, Whitman's method, and the resultant expansion brings a clarity to many parts of The Bridge which is seldom found in White Buildings. Thus Malcolm Cowley wrote, in reviewing The Bridge after it was finally published in 1930:

The ambitiousness of his earlier work was shown partly in tone, in its assumption of the grand manner, and partly in its attempt to crowd more images into each poem--more symbols, perceptions, and implications--than any few stanzas could hold or convey. The result in some cases was a sort of poetic shorthand which even the most attentive readers could understand with difficulty. In this second volume, merely by making the poems longer, he has made them vastly more intelligible.<sup>74</sup>

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74. Malcolm Cowley, "A Preface to Hart Crane," New Republic, LXII (February-May, 1930), p. 276.

The Bridge was conceived as a myth of America, which was to enclose all aspects of America--its past, present, and future, its soil and its cities, its beauty and its progress. Crane chose as his concrete symbol Brooklyn Bridge, and expanded it into a vehicle which would transport him into a journey of exploration, a journey through time and space, to a final unity of all the diverse elements of America, a utopia of the mind and of reality, a positive dream.

It is not a primary purpose of this paper to attempt a criticism of the structure of The Bridge. Although most critics seem to agree that there are flaws in the structure,<sup>75</sup> they do not seem to be in agreement concerning the reasons for the flaws. Allen Tate, however, makes an interesting comment relative to the symbol of the bridge and the structure of the poem as a whole:

. . . When Crane saw that his leading symbol, the bridge, would not cover all the material of his poem, he could not sustain it ironically in the classical manner. Alternately he asserts it and abandons it because fundamentally he does not understand it. The idea of bridgeship is an elaborate metaphor, a sentimental conceit leaving the inner structure of the poem confused.<sup>76</sup>

Was the symbol of the bridge, then, unsuccessful for

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75. See Brom Weber, Hart Crane: A Biographical and Critical Study, pp. 349-378; Allen Tate, "In Memoriam: Hart Crane," Round & Horn, V (July-September, 1932), pp. 615-17; Waldo Frank, "Introduction," The Collected Poems of Hart Crane, p. xxvii.

76. Tate, op. cit., pp. 615-16.



Crane--unsuccessful in carrying him back from the sea and its deadly fascination, into a great pantheistic vision of life, to America and its great heritage and its great future, as seen through the present and his symbol of the present, the bridge--which although made by the machine, yet had beauty? Or was Crane able to turn his back upon the sea and embrace the great continent of America--its great stretches of plains, its rivers, its cities and its industry? Without attempting any detailed analysis of The Bridge, one may examine some of the lines of the poem, and bearing in mind Crane's purpose, attempt to determine whether the symbolism employed in the poems in White Buildings has become reversed to any extent, or whether those symbols, and the themes which they represent, remain unchanged.

The Bridge is introduced by "Proem: To Brooklyn Bridge," in which Crane invokes the bridge as the symbol of his myth. It arises as a powerful force, free, and bringing freedom and unity, even as the seagull achieves freedom from the sea:

How many dawns, chill from his rippling rest  
The seagull's wings shall dip and pivot him,  
Shedding white rings of tumult, building high  
Over the chained bay waters Liberty--

. . . . .

And Thee, across the harbor, silver-paced  
As though the sun took step of thee, yet left  
Some motion ever unspend in thy stride,--  
Implicitly thy freedom staying thee!

Yet there is an indication immediately following that the

bridge can bring freedom through death, too, to the "bedlamite" (one who has lost his sense of order and unity in life):

Out of some subway scuttle, cell or loft

A bedlamite speeds to thy parapets,

Tilting there momentarily, shrill shirt ballooning,

A jest falls from the speechless caravan.

Although death from the bridge is not something meaningful, but merely a jest, one might draw a strange analogy here between the bridge and the rail of the Grizaba, from which Crane leaped to his death, for ships, like bridges, span water. But quickly Crane states his intention for the bridge-- it is to be the unifying symbol, the "harp" which it becomes in "Atlantis," upon which the great harmony of the universe shall be played, and which shall unite the prophet with the future, the outcast with the lover:

O harp and altar, of the fury fused,

(How could mere tell align thy choiring strings)

Terrific threshold of the prophet's pledge,

Prayer of pariah, and the lover's cry,--

But it is only in darkness, after the toll and fury of the city are done, that the image of the bridge becomes clear and powerful enough to overcome the dismal modern scene, even as snow can hide the ugliness of industry.

Under thy shadow by the piers I waited;

Only in darkness is thy shadow clear.

The City's fiery wheels all undone,

Already snow submerges an iron year. . .

In the final stanza are clearly felt the bridge's power and its purpose as the symbol of the Myth of America:

O sleepless as the river under thee,  
 Vaulting the sea, the prairies' dreaming sod,  
 Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend  
 And of the curvship lead a myth to God.

Crane's belief in his symbol is strong here; his faith is firm that he will be able to create the myth, and in doing so, achieve a bridge which will carry him to Cathay.

"Ave Maria," Part I, is the vision and prayer of Columbus; as Crane first conceived it, "Conquest of space, chaos,"<sup>77</sup> He outlined the poem in the following way:

Columbus' will--knowledge  
 Isabella's will--Christ  
 Fernando's will--gold

--3 ships  
 --2 destroyed

1 remaining will, Columbus<sup>78</sup>

The power of the sea is still strong in this poem, however; as Columbus journeys back to Spain, having found, as he thought, Cathay, he feels the power of the sea to detain him still:

Here waves climb into dusk on gleaming mail;  
 Invisible valves of the sea--locks, tendons  
 Crested and creeping, troughing corridors  
 That fall back yawning to another plunge.  
 Slowly the sun's red caravel drops light  
 Once more behind us....It is morning there--  
 O where our Indian emperies lie revealed,  
 Yet lost, all, let this keel one instant yield!

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77. Philip Horton, Hart Crane: The Life of an American Poet, p. 198.

78. Weber, op. cit., p. 342.

Yet he has found refuge in the land and palms, and prays to  
do so again:

. . . (O Madre Maria, still  
One ship of these thou grantest safe returning;  
Assure us through thy mantle's ageless blue!)

Here the development of Crane's outline can be seen; two ships  
(the wills of Isabel and Ferdinand) have been destroyed, but  
one will, Columbus's--that of knowledge--still remains and  
shall remain against the timelessness of the sea. But the sea  
is a test of the knowledge he has gained, and its unity and  
duality still come through:

For here between two worlds, another, harsh,

This third, of water, tests the word; . .

and later;

O Thou who sleepest on Thyself, apart  
Like ocean athwart lanes of death and birth,  
And all the eddying breath between dost search  
Cruelly with love thy parable of man,--

But finally Columbus (and the poet) feel that they have over-  
come the power of the sea, and through knowledge and faith  
have overcome superstition and fear, as the poet looks to  
part II, Pocahontas, the earth-mother, the positive symbol  
of life.

White toil of heaven's cordons, mustering  
In holy rings all sails charged to the far  
Hushed gleaming fields and pendent seething wheat  
Of knowledge,-- . . .<sup>79</sup>

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79. Some interesting comparisons can be made between  
this poem and Whitman's "Prayer of Columbus." See Walt Whit-  
man, Leaves of Grass, pp. 472-74.

Part II, "Powhatan's Daughter," symbolizes "The natural body of America, fertility, etc."<sup>80</sup> In a letter to Otto Kahn, art-patron who was subsidizing Crane while he wrote The Bridge, Crane wrote:

Powhatan's daughter, or Pocahontas, is the mythological nature-symbol chosen to represent the physical body of the continent, or the soil. She here takes on much the same role as the traditional Hertha of ancient Teutonic mythology. The five sub-sections of Part II are mainly concerned with a gradual exploration of this "body" whose first possessor was the Indian.<sup>81</sup>

He also explained the marginal notes that occur from time to time in Part II:

The love-motif (in italics) carries along a symbolism of the life and ages of man (here the sowing of the seed) which is further developed in each of the subsequent sections of Powhatan's Daughter, though it is never particularly stressed. In 2 (Van Winkle) it is Childhood; in 3 it is Youth; in 4, Manhood; in 5 it is Age. This motif is interwoven and tends to be implicit in the imagery rather than anywhere stressed.<sup>82</sup>

The question that arises, then, in regard to Part II, is this: Was Crane able to accept the great body of the American continent, and take from it, as Whitman had, inspiration from its past, belief in its present, and faith in its future?

It is in "Powhatan's Daughter" that Crane is probably most successful in picturing the warmth, the vibrance, the

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80. Hart Crane, "Letter to Otto Kahn," included in Horton, op. cit., Appendix III, pp. 335-36.

81. Ibid.

82. Ibid., p. 337.

pulsating life that is America's and has been America's throughout her history. Especially when is writing of rural America, with its broad expanses of prairies, of mountains, of fields and rivers, does he have faith in his myth. But when he attempts to synthesize all of American life--the city with the country, the past with the present, beauty with mechanized civilization--there are indications that he finds the synthesis difficult. For instance, in "Harbor Dawn," when the poet is called back from sleep and dreams of the past (Columbus) into twentieth-century Manhattan, from where he starts off in his journey of exploration, it is an unwilling awakening, attended by symbols of coldness for Crane:

Insistently through sleep--a tide of voices--  
 They meet you listening midway in your dream,  
 The long, tired sounds, fog-insulated noises:  
 Gongs in white surplises, beehrouded wails,  
 Far strum of fog horns...signals dispersed in veils,

Reluctant to face the day, the poet turns to his lover lying there beside him, and unites with her in a moment of passion, but the day relentlessly comes on:

The window goes blond slowly. Frostily clears,  
 From Cyclopean towers across Manhattan waters  
 --Two--three bright window-eyes aglitter, disk  
 The sun, released--aloft with cold gulls hither.

In "Van Winkle," however, the poet has accepted the day, the present, and with the morning begins his exploration of the continent, and its past, led by Rip Van Winkle, the "Indigen-

ous 'Muse of Memory'" who becomes "the 'guardian angel' of the journey into the past,"<sup>83</sup> and who boards the subway with him as the journey begins :

Macadam, gun-grey as the tunny's belt,  
Leaps from Far Rockaway to Golden Gate....  
Keep hold of that nickel for car-change, Rip,--  
Have you got your "Times"--?  
And hurry along, Van Winkle--it's getting late!

In "The River" the subway merges into a railroad speeding into the midwest, the railroad merges into the continent, which the pioneers have explored across its broad expanse, and the continent finally merges into the river, symbol of the great stream of life. Horton interprets it thus:

. . . all movements and subjects--the train, the tramps, pioneers, past, present and future time--all gather up and flow with fine inevitability into the Mississippi, the central artery of the country's physical body and historical spirit, the Indian's "Father of Waters," now become a symbol of the endless current of humanity and fate. . .<sup>84</sup>

In the first section of "The River" there is the first real indication in The Bridge of the poet's feeling of the nightmare and sterility of twentieth-century American life, and it is no doubt significant that he is leaving the present--is journeying backward in time to find the true spirit of the American continent. In these lines, as the train speeds westward, the poet gives the impression from the billboards of

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83. Ibid.

84. Horton, op. cit., p. 333.

the meaningless jumble of American life today.

. . . while an Express makes time like  
SCIENCE--COMMERCE and the HOLYHOST  
RADIO ROARS IN EVERY HOME WE HAVE THE NORTHPOLE  
WALLSTREET AND VIRGINBIRTH WITHOUT STONES OR  
WIRES OR EVEN RUNNING brooks connecting ears  
and no more sermons windows flashing roar  
Breathtaking--as you like it. . . eh?

But the train speeds by, leaving three tramps on the tracks,  
who become identified both with the pioneers and with the  
poet, all of whom have explored the continent, and have  
known it intimately. The tramps ". . . are psychological  
vehicles, also. Their wanderings . . . carry the reader into  
interior after interior, all of it funneled by the Missis-  
sippi. They are the left-overs of the pioneers . . ."85  
And here are the first intimations of the beauty and grand  
attraction of the continent, or Pocahontas.

Yet they touch something like a key perhaps.  
From pole to pole across the hills, the states

. . . . .

They lurk across her, knowing her yonder breast  
Snow-silvered, sumac-stained or smoky blue--  
Is past the valley-sleepers, south or west,  
As I have trod the rumored midnights, too,

It is here, also, that first appear the symbols, repeated in  
"The Dance" and finally in "Atlantis," of time and space  
which the continent embraces--the serpent and the eagle.

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85. Hart Crane, "Letter to Otto Kahn," included in  
Horton, op. cit., Appendix III, p. 338.



. . . But I knew her body there,  
Time like a serpent down her shoulder, dark  
And space, an eagle's wing, laid on her hair.

And then the continent merges into the River--the great  
streaming life--past, present, and future--of which the poet  
wishes to feel himself a part. Its waters are not stormy, like  
those of the sea, but steady, patient, and forever moving.

You will not hear it as the sea; even stone  
Is not more hushed by gravity...But slow,  
As loth to take more tribute--sliding prone  
Like one whose eyes were buried long ago.

The River, spreading, flows--and spends your dream.  
What are you, lost within this tideless spell?  
You are your father's father, and the stream--  
A liquid theme that floating niggers swell.

But where is this great stream going? Toward what is it  
flowing? The sea. As the bridge has crossed the continent,  
and comes once more to the sea, the River moves toward the  
sea inevitably. And the sea is not kind, it is "stinging":

And flows within itself, heaps itself free:  
All fades but one thin skyline 'round...Ahead  
No embrace opens but the stinging sea;  
The River lifts itself from its long bed,

Poised wholly on its dream, a mustard glow  
Tortured with history, its one will--flow!  
--The Passion spreads in wide tongues, choked and slow,  
Meeting the Gulf, hosannas silently below.

The River is identified here with passion, as life is con-  
nected with passion, but although one might say that the river  
flows into the sea here much as life flows into death, it is  
not the final kind of death, the explosive death in which  
life is extinguished completely, for the implication is that

the water will return as rain and once more bring life to the land. It is the conception of death as Crane sees it in life--and-death cycles, life's great flux and change contrasted with timelessness and eternity.

Of the fourth section of "Powhatan's daughter," "The Dance," Crane wrote:

Here one is on the pure mythical and smoky soil at last! Not only do I describe the conflict between the two races in this dance--I also become identified with the Indian and his world before it is over, which is the only method possible of ever really possessing the Indian and his world as a cultural factor. I think I really succeed in getting under the skin of this glorious and dying animal, in terms of expression, in symbols, which he, himself, would comprehend. Pocahontas (the continent) is the common basis of our meeting, she survives the extinction of the Indian, who finally, after being assumed into the elements of nature (as he understood them) persists only as a kind of 'eye' in the sky, or as a star that hangs between day and night--'the twilight's dim perpetual throne.'<sup>86</sup>

Now the poet travels still farther backward in time, back to the days of primitive America, and he visualizes Pocahontas, the continent, as the bridge of the Indian brave, who, as Crane explains, has lived on. Bridging time back to the days of the Indian dances, he finally becomes one with the Indian, and dances with him:

Dance, Maquokeeta! snake that lives before  
That casts his pelt, and lives beyond! Sprout, horn!  
Spark, tooth! Medicine-man, relent, restore--  
Lie to us,--dance us back the tribal morn!

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86. Ibid.

It should perhaps be explained that Crane took the name "Maquo-keeta", as the name for his Indian brave from a cab-driver whom he knew in New York City whose middle name was Maquo-keeta, and who was part Indian. He told Crane that the name meant "big river."<sup>87</sup> It is significant too, that even as Crane becomes identified with the Indian brave, he asks him, "Lie to us," as if even in his desire to return to "tribal morn," he realizes that it is a false desire--the world of the twentieth century reaches him, and is too strong in him. But he makes the attempt, although he must now travel back into the present, seeing on his journey the death of the Indian, and the death of the love of the Indian and Pocahontas, his bride. There is an indication here again of the changing quality of time.

O like the lizard in the furious noon,  
That drops his legs and colors in the sun,  
--And laughs, pure serpent, Time itself, and moon  
Of his own fate, I saw thy change begun!

And saw thee dive to kiss that destiny  
Like one white meteor, sacrosanct and blent  
At last with all that's consummate and free  
There, where the first and last gods keep thy tent.

But Pocahontas lives on:

Lo, through what infinite seasons dost thou gaze--  
Across what bivouacs of thin angered slain,  
And see'st thy bride immortal in the maize!

And the sun, renewing spring, still has power to awaken her,

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87. Weber, op. cit., p. 337.

to bring life and warmth out of the cold of winter:

High unto Labrador the sun strikes free  
Her speechless dream of snow, and stirred again,  
She is the torrent and the singing tree;  
And she is virgin to the last of men...

The final stanza of "The Dance" is a tribute to the Indian, the primitive, that the poet has crossed time and space to find:

We danced, O Brave, we danced beyond their farms,  
In cobalt desert closures made our vows...  
Now is the strong prayer folded in thine arms,  
The serpent with the eagle in the boughs.

"Indiana," the final section of "Powhatan's Daughter," is the monologue of an Indiana farm woman whose son is leaving for a life at sea. It "signalizes the transference of the role of Pocahontas to the pioneer white woman, or, from another angle, the absorption of this Pocahontas symbolism by the pioneer white woman. . ."<sup>88</sup> It is a summary of part II. "The entire section is framed by the sea again. In the beginning, Columbus and the Harbor Dawn,--finally the departure of the first-born for a life before the mast."<sup>89</sup> "Indiana" is one of the last parts of The Bridge which Crane wrote. It is a weak section--the symbolism, aside from the fact that Crane transfers the role of Pocahontas to the

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<sup>88</sup>, Hart Crane, "Letter to Otto Kahn," included in Horton, op. cit., p. 338.

<sup>89</sup>. Ibid., p. 339.



The scene is a bar in South Street. The poet's companion is a rum-soaked old sailor who carries him back through memory and a haze of alcoholism--"Cutty Sark" is a brand of Scotch--<sup>92</sup> to a vision of the great days of the past when sailing ships were in the height of their glory, and whaling was a thrilling occupation:

Murmurs of Leviathan he spoke,  
and rum was Plato in our heads...

And as they are talking, the nickel-in-the-slot piano plays "Stamboul Nights," bringing on an inkling of the vision of Atlantis, or eternal truth:

O Stamboul Rose--dreams weave the rose!

There seems to be some confusion in Crane's mind, or at least a contradiction arising out of his dual nature, concerning the concept of time. It has been noted that in White Buildings, and in such poems as "The River" and "The Dance," the temporal quality of life was to Crane a pleasant thing, and the idea of timelessness, in the sense of eternity, was associated with all the other symbols of coldness and separation. And yet he says that Atlantis signifies eternity, or the Absolute, and that "Cutty Sark" is so arranged that the voices of the world of Time and the world of Eternity are interwoven into the action. The whole concept of The Bridge

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<sup>92</sup>. Horton, op. cit., p. 256.

turns on the conquest of time and space with the goal of reaching eternal truth. Yet here, the old seaman says:

I ought to keep time and get over it--I'm a  
Democrat--I know what time it is--No  
I don't want to know what time it is--that  
damned white Arctic killed my time..."

Here again the idea of no time is associated with the symbols of whiteness and cold for Crane. And immediately following these lines comes in once again the voice of eternity:

O Stamboul Rose--drums weave--

so that Crane's concept of time remains confused. The pull of the sea is strong in this section; the old sailor says:

"O life's a geyser--beautiful--my lungs--  
No--I can't live on land--!"

At dawn the old sailor and the poet leave the bar, the sailor to return to his ship, his "liberty" on land over:

--he lunged up Bowery way while the dawn  
was putting the Statue of Liberty out--that  
torch of hers you know--

And the poet starts walking home across the Bridge, his head filled with dreams of the past glories and romance and beauty of the days of clipper ships, trade with the orient, and early conquest of the sea.

Part IV, "Cape Hatteras," was conceived as an ode to Whitman, who symbolizes the spiritual body of America. Having explored the physical body of the continent in "Powhatan's Daughter," and the sea in "Cutty Sark," Crane now returns to the past and works into the present, exploring space and

the air, and showing man's conquest of the air by one of his machines--the airplane. The air seems to represent the spiritual body of America, and the poet takes the hand of Whitman in order to explore it, for Whitman was the prophet of the machine age and the champion of science. For this poem, as for "Ave Maria," Crane prepared an outline of the themes to be treated:

- (1) Cape--land--combustion  
conceive as a giant turning
- (2) Powerhouse
- (3) Offshoot--Kitty Hawk  
Take off
- (4) War--in general
- (5) Resolution (Whitman)<sup>93</sup>

The poet's starting point on this journey is the land--he sees the evolution of the cape (Hatteras) near which the first airplane was flown, and he invokes Whitman as the singer of the greatness and beauty of the land:

Or to read you, Walt,--knowing us in thrall

To that deep wonderment, our native clay  
Whose depth of red, eternal flesh of Pocahontas--  
Those continental folded aeons, surcharged  
With sweetness below derricks, chimneys, tunnels--  
Is veined by all that time has really pledged us...

The poet, still in the present, sees how man has conquered space, but he also sees how man's conquest of space has conquered man, so that in seeking freedom he has lost it:

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93. Weber, op. cit., p. 342.



Now the eagle dominates our days, is jurist  
Of the ambiguous cloud. We know the strident rule  
Of wings imperious...

.....

Dream cancels dream in this new realm of fact  
From which we wake into the dream of act;  
Seeing himself as atom in a shroud--  
Man hears himself an engine in a cloud!

Crane is beginning to lose faith in his myth. The present has not lived up to the dreams of the past. Whitman's vision has, in a sense, been betrayed. But he plunges on, hoping that the spirit of Whitman will outlive the sordidness of the commercial world:

O Saunterer on free ways still ahead!  
Not this our empire yet, but labyrinth  
Wherein your eyes, like the Great Navigator's without  
Ship  
Gleam from the great stones of each prison crypt  
Of canyoned traffic...Confronting the Exchange,  
Surviving in a world of stocks--they also range  
Across the hills where second timber strays  
Back over Connecticut farms, abandoned pastures,--  
Sea eyes and tidal, undenyng, bright with myth!

He compares Whitman's vision to that of Columbus; Whitman's eyes are "sea eyes and tidal"--yet another indication that Crane felt, or realized, even as Whitman did, that despite any conscious effort to build a dream of a great, positive, social utopia, the call in the individual who could not, underneath it all, reconcile himself to that utopia, who could not adjust himself to live in that kind of a world, was always the call of the sea--and death. And while Whitman had

written:

Americanoes! conquerors! marches humanitarian ;  
Foremost! century marches! Libertad! masses!  
For you a programme of chants.<sup>94</sup>

and later:

I accept reality, and dare not question it;  
Materialism first and last imbuing.  
Hurrah for positive science! long live exact demon-  
stration!<sup>95</sup>

affirming his belief in knowledge and science and truth as  
the salvation of mankind, and the threshold to a great world  
dedicated to the spirit of broad living and truth, he had  
also written:

Whereto answering, the sea,  
Delaying not, hurrying not,  
Whisper'd me through the night, and very plainly  
before daybreak,  
Lisp'd to me the low and delicious word DEATH;  
Hissing melodious, neither like the bird, nor like  
my arous'd child's heart,  
But edging near, as privately for me, rustling at  
my feet,  
Creeping thence steadily up to my ears, and leaving  
me softly all over,  
Death, Death, Death, Death, Death.<sup>96</sup>

and:

Approach, Strong Deliveress!  
When it is so--when thou hast taken them, I joyously  
sing the dead,

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94. Walt Whitman, "Starting from Paumanok," Leaves of Grass, p. 17.

95. Whitman, "Walt Whitman," op. cit., pp. 53-54.

96. Whitman, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," op. cit., p. 407.

Lost in the loving, floating ocean of thee,  
Laved in the flood of thy bliss, O Death.<sup>97</sup>

Whitman, too, was a poet of duality, torn between his great democratic vision, his love of life and of mankind, and a strong pull toward the sea and death. Horace Gregory, in quoting a criticism by Saintsbury of Whitman's Leaves of Grass, states that it might be appropriately applied to Crane:

. . .there are two subjects on which he is especially eloquent, which seem indeed to intoxicate and inspire him the moment he approaches them. These are Death and the sea . . . in his connection of the two ideas (for one always seems to suggest the other to him), and in his special devotion to Death, he is more singular."<sup>98</sup>

It is probable that Crane finally recognized that the affinity between himself and Whitman was broader than the mere sharing of a vision of future America, for the older poet, too, could not fully believe in his vision, as Crane, finally, could not wholly believe in The Bridge.

The next stanza of "Cape Hatteras" is a celebration of the power of the machine, beginning, "The nasal whine of power whips a new universe..." But although Crane writes, "New verities, new inklings in the velvet hummed," the effect of the stanza is not one which makes the reader feel a great love of the machine, for it employs such phrases as:

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97. Whitman, "Death Carol," from "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," op. cit., p. 373.

98. Horace Gregory and Marya Zaturenska, "Hart Crane: Death and the Sea," A History of American Poetry, 1900-1940, p. 463.

. . . but fast in whirling armatures,  
 As bright as frogs' eyes, giggling in the girth  
 Of steely gizzards--axle-bound, confined  
 In coiled precision. . .

Crane next travels back in time to describe the flight of the first airplane at Kitty Hawk--the conquest of space. This conquest, however, has not brought freedom and peace, but war:

The soul, by naphtha fledged into new reaches,  
 Already knows the closer clasp of Mars,--  
 New latitudes, unknotting, soon give place  
 To what fierce schedules, rife of doom apact!

There follows a description of war, especially air warfare, and once more Crane turns to Whitman to regain his vision, and a belief that after death in war there comes a rebirth of faith:

But who has held the heights more sure than thou,  
 O Walt!--Ascensions of thee hover in me now  
 As thou at junctions elegiac, there, of speed  
 With vast eternity, dost wield the rebound seed!

. . . . .

. . . O, upward from the dead  
 Thou bringest tally, and a pact, new bound,  
 Of living brotherhood!

There is here too a reaffirmation of faith in Whitman's social utopia and the brotherhood of man. But later, he senses again Whitman's affinity with the sea, and the duality of Whitman's poetry and his philosophy:

When first I read thy lines, rife as the loam  
 Of prairies, yet like breakers cliffward leaping!

But he must cling desperately to the positive, panormanic view

of life that was Whitman's--the belief that was the inspiration for The Bridge:

Our Meistersinger, thou set breath in steel;  
And it was thou who on the boldest heel  
Stood up and flung the span on even wing  
Of that great Bridge, our Myth, whereof I sing!

He must affirm the vision of the machine age, the great "span of consciousness" that will bring the new life, and his desperation in the affirmation is evident in the final stanza, where he takes the hand of Whitman, "never to let go."

And now...  
Vast engines outward veering with seraphic grace  
On clarion cylinders pass out of sight  
To course that span of Consciousness thou'st named  
The Open Road--thy vision is reclaimed!  
What heritage thou'st signalled to our hands!

.....

Yes, Walt,  
Afoot again, and onward without halt,--  
Not soon, nor suddenly,--No, never to let go  
My hand

in yours,  
Walt Whitman--

so--

The poem is sprawling, disorganized, and repetitious, It lacks the organic tightness characteristic of the poems in White Buildings, or even of such sections of The Bridge as "Ave Maria." Crane realized the weakness of the poem, for he wrote Tate in 1930, after reading Tate's review of The Bridge:

The personal note is doubtless responsible for what you term as sentimentality in my attitude toward Whitman. It's true that my rhapsodic address to him in The Bridge exceeds any exact evaluation of the man. I realized that in the midst of composition. But since you and I hold such diver-

gent prejudices regarding the materials and events I responded to. . . . there isn't much use in my tabulating the qualified yet persistent reasons I have for my admiration of him, and my allegiance to the positive universal tendencies implicit in nearly all his best work. You've heard me roar at too many of his lines to doubt that I can spot his worst, I'm sure.<sup>99</sup>

And it is important to remember that this section was among the last that Crane wrote, in 1929, after he had lost the bright vision of the myth, after he had gone through periods of despair of ever finishing The Bridge at all, and after he had written such statements as this one in a letter to Waldo Frank:

Emotionally I should like to write the Bridge, intellectually judged the whole theme and project seems more and more absurd. . . I had what I thought were authentic materials that would have been a pleasurable-agony of wrestling, eventuating or not in perfection,--at least being worthy of the most supreme efforts I could muster.

These materials were valid to me to the extent that I presumed them to be (articulate or not) at least organic and active factors in the experience and perceptions of our common race, time, and belief. The very idea of a bridge, of course, is a form peculiarly dependent on such spiritual convictions. It is an act of faith besides being a communication. The symbols of reality necessary to articulate the span may not exist where you expected them, however. By which I mean that however great their subjective significance to me is concerned--these forms, materials, dynamics are simply non-existent in the world. I may amuse and delight and delight and flatter myself as much as I please--but I am only evading a recognition and playing Don Quixote in an immorally conscious way.

The form of my poem rises out of a past that so overwhelms the present with its worth and vision that I'm at

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99. Quoted by Horton, op. cit., pp. 268-69.

a loss to explain my delusion that there exist any real links between that past and a future destiny worthy of it. The "destiny" is long since completed, perhaps the little last section of my poem is a hangover echo of it-- but it hangs suspended somewhere in ether like an Absalom by his hair. The bridge as a symbol today has no significance beyond an economical approach to shorter hours, quicker lunches, behaviourism and toothpicks. And inasmuch as the bridge is a symbol of all such poetry as I am interested in writing it is my present fancy that a year from now I'll be more contented working in an office than before . . . All this does not mean that I have resigned myself to inactivity. A bridge will be written in some kind of style and form, at worst it will be something as good as advertising copy. After which I will have at least done my best to discharge my debt to Kahn's kindness.<sup>100</sup>

"Cape Hatteras" lacks conviction, unity and clarity, but despite all that, there are some passages in which Crane lives up to his best work.

"Three Songs" ("Southern Cross," "National Winter Garden," "Virginia") which constitute Part V of The Bridge seem to have little organic relationship to the rest of the poem. Crane wrote to Baldo Frank after writing them, "Two or three songs have just popped out . . . which come after 'Cutty Sark'".<sup>101</sup> Why Crane intended to include them after "Cutty Sark" and why he did include them after "Cape Hatteras" is not certain. Weber has pointed out that if the American continent is being explored from several different angles,

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100. Quoted from Horton, op. cit., pp. 205-6.

101. Quoted by Weber, op. cit., p. 293.

their logical piece would be in the "Pomahatan's Daughter" section.<sup>102</sup> The poems are three approaches to the theme of woman. In the first, "Southern Cross," she is something to be desired and loved; in the second, "National Winter Garden," she is shown as the overwhelming power of lust; in the third, "Virginia," she is youthful and a charming virgin, somehow connected with the Virgin Mary--something to be worshipped. They contradict, in a sense, the affirmation of the other sections of the poem, for they are most of all songs concerning the inaccessibility of woman (beauty); she is something to be desired, an aspiration which is not fulfilled except through lust, which is a degradation of beauty. In this connection it may be worth while to glance at "National Winter Garden." It takes its title from a burlesque house in New York which was one of Crane's haunts.<sup>103</sup> After presenting lust in rather horrible terms, as something to be fled, Crane appends this final stanza:

Yet, to the empty trespere of your flesh,  
O Magdalene, each comes back to die alone.  
Then you, the burlesque of our lust--and faith,  
Lug us back lifeward--home by infant bone.

In the symbol of Magdalene, the woman who, although a prostitute, had more beauty of spirit and faith than the "good"

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102. *Ibid.*, p. 367.

103. Horton, *op. cit.*, p. 213.



woman who was her sister, there is an implication that through the act of just (again "dying" is used in the sense of the sexual orgasm) comes the rebirth of the spirit--the same implication which is in "Faustus and Helen" and other poems in White Buildings, the purification by fire through which the poet finds the purity of "Virginia" in the final poem of the series. Altogether, the songs indicate a return to the mood of White Buildings; their function in the structure of The Bridge is slight, if it exists at all, and they seem to be, as "Cape Hatteras" is, an indication of Crane's loss of faith in himself and in his conception of The Bridge.

"Quaker Hill," Part VI, finished after "Cape Hatteras," shows even more clearly than that poem the disillusionment which Crane felt concerning The Bridge. It portrays the beauty and spirit of early America, especially in New England, overcome by the materialism of modern America, and the resultant sterility of spirit. Like "Three Songs," the function of "Quaker Hill" in the structure of The Bridge is not clear. It is evident that Crane did not consider it an important part, for he wrote of it, "Quaker Hill is not, after all, one of the major sections of the poem; it is rather by way of an 'accent mark' that it is valuable at all."<sup>104</sup> What it accentuates, more than anything, is the admission by Crane

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<sup>104</sup>. Quoted by Weber, op. cit., pp. 369-70.

that he has lost his great vision of his "myth"--its meaning has become obscured, and all he can see in modern society is the degradation of beauty and crass commercialism. The future utopia in which spirit and matter shall become one through the machine and the Bridge, product of the machine, is blank. A few lines from the poem will serve to demonstrate how Crane has rejected what he had earlier embraced:

Who holds the lease on time and on disgrace?  
 What eats the pattern with ubiquity?  
 Where are my kinsmen and the patriarch race?

and later:

So, must we from the hawk's far stemming view,  
 Must we descend as worm's eye to construe  
 Our love of all we touch, and take it to the Gate  
 As humbly as a guest who knows himself too late,  
 His news already told? Yes, while the heart is wrung,  
 Arise--yes, take this sheaf of dust upon your tongue!

The hawk, or the eagle, conquering space, has become the worm, who comes too late--the destiny of America which Crane foresaw when he began The Bridge has already passed, and is disintegrating, so that The Bridge becomes merely a "sheaf of dust."

In "The Tunnel," Part VII, the poet completes the day's journey which was begun in "Harbor Dawn" and "Van Winkle." The "tunnel" is the subway which the poet takes home at the end of the day. Crane originally outlined this part as, "Subway--The encroachment of machinery on humanity; a kind of purgatory in relation to the open sky of the last section."<sup>105</sup>

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105. quoted by Horton, op. cit., p. 198.

The poem is a symbol of the descent into hell which in epic literature (such as the Divine Comedy) is a prerequisite to ascending to the heights of heaven. It is the "cleansing by fire" necessary in order to behold the final bright vision. And the hell that Crane portrays in the poem is metropolitan New York--the city again, and the city in all its horror, its ugliness, its brutality, the smallness and meanness of the minds of its people. Recalling what Crane has written about the city in some of the poems in White Buildings, one notices that he finds it more difficult in "The Tunnel" to see anything pleasing about the city. But he realizes that the subway journey is necessary, for while it plunges him to the depths, it shall also lift him again--lift him so that through all of experience he can finally find the absolute, truth--and thus it acts as a foil, as Weber says," to the triumph and light of the last section ('Atlantis')."<sup>106</sup> It is interesting to note that Crane wrote "The Tunnel" in the summer of 1926, when he was on the Isle of Pines in the Carribean. Of "The Tunnel" he wrote, "It's rather ghastly, almost surgery, and, oddly almost all from the notes and stitches I have written while swinging on the strap at late midnights going home."<sup>107</sup> Even in the midst of beauty, far from the city, he

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106. Weber, op. cit., p. 372.

107. Quoted by Horton, op. cit., p. 211.

could remember with detailed and vivid horror the aspects of the city which appalled him.

At midnight the poet starts home, tempted to walk a brief distance first, but "The subway yawns the quickest promise home," and putting the temptation from him, he enters:

Avoid the glass doors gyring at your right,  
Where boxed alone a second, eyes take fright  
--quite unprepared, rush naked back to light;  
And down beside the turnstile press the coin  
Into the slot. The gongs already rattle.

And there, among masses of humanity, he overhears scraps of conversation--or rather they beat upon his ears in monotone:

Our tongues recant like beaten weather vanes,  
This answer lives like verdigris, like hair  
Beyond extinction, surcease of the bone;  
And repetition freezes---

and finally bring from him the scalding comment:

The phonographs of hades in the brain  
Are tunnels that re-wind themselves, and love  
A burnt match skating in a urinal--

Here the voices, the brain, the tunnel, all are a kind of hell,  
and in the midst of that hell Crane suddenly finds Poe:

Whose head is swinging from the swollen strap?  
Whose body smokes along the bitten rails,  
Bursts from a smoldering bundle far behind  
In back forks of the chasms of the brain,--  
Puffs from a riven stump far out behind  
In interborough fissures of the mind...?  
And why do I often meet your visage here,  
Your eyes like agate lanterns--on and on  
Below the toothpaste and the dandruff ads?  
--And did their riding eyes right through your side,  
And did their eyes like unwashed platters ride?

And Death, aloft,--gigantically down  
 Probing through you--toward me, O evermore!  
 And when they dragged your retching flesh,  
 Your trembling hands that night through Baltimore--  
 That last night on the ballot rounds, did you  
 Shaking, did you deny the ticket, Poe?

There are two interpretations of the above passage which it might be interesting to examine for purposes of comparison and contrast, before drawing any final conclusions from the passage itself, for there is no doubt a measure of truth in both. In his "Introduction" to the Collected Poems, Waldo Frank states:

If the reader understands Poe, he will understand the apparition. Of all the classic poets of the great tradition in America, Poe--perhaps the least as artist--was the most advanced, the most prophetic as thinker. All, as we have noted, were content more or less with the merely transplanted terms of an agrarian culture. Only Poe guessed the transfiguring effect of the Machine upon the forms of human life, upon the very concept of the person. The Tunnel gives us man in his industrial hell which the machine--his hand and heart--has made; now let the machine be his godlike Hand to uplift him! The plunging subway shall merge with the vaulting bridge. Whitman gives the vision; Poe, however vaguely, the method.<sup>108</sup>

Weber, speaking of the dual nature of the symbol of Atlantis, which can be construed to represent both the ideal toward which men strive, and corruption and oblivion (as shall be noted further in the discussion of "Atlantis"), then points out:

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<sup>108</sup>. Waldo Frank, "Introduction," The Collected Poems of Hart Crane, p. xxvi.

. . . One can now understand the significance which the vision of Poe plays in "The Tunnel." It is true that Poe was afraid of science, that he wrote "A Descent into the Maelstrom," and that Roderick Usher in Poe's story, "The Fall of the House of Usher," painted a picture of a fantastic tunnel. But it is more important to realize that the lines which Crane uses in "The Tunnel" to compare his situation with Poe's are reworked from Poe's poem "The City in the Sea." . . . In that poem Poe described his vision of a city of the dead sinking into the sea, its towers and riches unable to preserve it from its fate, while from a proud tower in the town / Death looks gigantesquely down.<sup>109</sup>

The implications here are multitudinous. When it is remembered that Poe, like Crane, was an artist whose spirit was in conflict with his times, and that, like Crane, he was a poet who wavered between science and mysticism and tried to solve his problems and the problems of the universe by some rather wierd combinations of the two, one can perhaps infer that Crane, in these lines, felt himself closely akin to Poe, and that for him as for Poe there was no possibility of denying death. This inference would make both the city and the tunnel symbols of a death that is very real, and from which there is no revival, and would negate the force of the later stanza, in which Crane, after referring to the subway as a "Daemon" plunging toward death, is, like Lazarus, recalled to life after the agony of death:

O caught like pennies beneath soot and steam,  
Kiss of our agony thou gatherest;  
Condensed, thou takest all--shrill ganglia

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109. Weber, op. cit., pp. 377-78.

Impassioned with some song we fail to keep.  
 And yet, like Lazarus, to feel the slope,  
 The sod and billow breaking,--lifting ground,  
 --A sound of waters bending astride the sky  
 Unceasing with some word that will not die....!

Yet this stanza is necessary if the structure of The Bridge is to be unified at all, for in order to catch a glimpse of Atlantis, the poet must come up from this hell, return from this death, to find some kind of beauty and life in the world. He does return to the present from his journey through memory into the past, and finds himself back at the harbor that he left in the dawn. But even here, as the hands "drop memory" in the waters of the river and lie there in the water, comes the question: shall they be drawn away by the river, into the sea, to die?

And this thy harbor, O my City, I have driven under,  
 Tossed from the coil of ticking towers,...Tomorrow,  
 And to be...Here by the River that is East--  
 Here at the waters' edge the hands drop memory;  
 Shadowless in that abyss they unaccounting lie.  
 How far away the star has pooled the sea--  
 Or shall the hands be drawn away, to die?

The answer comes:

Kiss of our agony Thou gatherest,  
                             O Hand of Fire  
   gatherest--

"Atlantis" is the final section of The Bridge, the great vision, the unity, the absolute experience, toward which all the other sections have been moving. The symbolism of the title is especially significant. This section is the one which Crane began to write first, when he conceived

the idea of The Bridge early in 1923. It was originally to be entitled "The Bridge," and in his early outline was planned as "A sweeping dithyramb in which the Bridge becomes the symbol of consciousness spanning time and space."<sup>110</sup> It was not until after the summer of 1926, after Crane had begun to be disillusioned about his "myth," that he changed the title to "Atlantis."<sup>111</sup> It must have been after this time, too that he wrote "Cutty Sark," wherein is found the first glimpse of Atlantis. Weber points out that Atlantis is subject to two interpretations, and those two interpretations are diametrically opposed. The first is the description of Atlantis by Plato as an ideal society where people united gentleness with wisdom, situated on an island, and having both physical beauty and social harmony; it supposedly sank back into the sea, and finally became the symbol of the social ideal for which men through the ages sought. The second interpretation stems from Plato's continued relation of how, before the island sank back into the sea, its people became less god-like than mortal, and with human nature came greed, imperialism and corruption.<sup>112</sup> So the concept of Atlantis is not an unsullied one. Whether or not Crane was conscious of this

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<sup>110</sup>. Quoted by Horton, op. cit., p. 198.

<sup>111</sup>. Weber, op. cit., p. 375.

<sup>112</sup>. Weber, op. cit., pp. 376-77.



dual interpretation is uncertain, but certainly he thought of Atlantis as Eternity, or the Absolute, when writing of the theme of "Cutty Sark." Why he changed the title and the conception of the final part of The Bridge is a matter which deserves speculation, especially when it is remembered that originally the land toward which the bridge was building was Cathay, symbol of the unity of wealth and wisdom. Columbus thought that he had found Cathay; furthermore, Cathay is tangible--it exists in the world, whereas Atlantis is merely a legendary island which men have sought but have never found. When it is remembered that Poe's poem, "The City in the Sea," made such an impression on Crane that he transposed some lines from it into "The Tunnel," and that Poe's poem visualizes a city of the dead "Far down within the dim West," whose pretentious towers and turrets are mockery of a long-dead glory, and which finally sinks and settles into the sea,<sup>113</sup> and when it is remembered, too, that the legendary Atlantis was supposed to be somewhere in the western sea (the Atlantic), the inference is unmistakable that Crane did realize the darker aspect of Atlantis as well as its bright, idealistic, visionary aspect. This duality remains in "Atlantis;" it is not finally resolved, and the unity is

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113. Edgar Allen Poe, "The City in The Sea," The Complete Poetical Works of Edgar Allen Poe, pp. 44-45.

not achieved.

There is something else in "Atlantis" which further complicates this final achievement, this "absolute" toward which the earlier sections of the poem have been projecting, and that is the concept of the bridge as a harp upon which beautiful harmonies and melodies can be played. A bridge, an island, a harp, and music--on all these levels does Crane build his final poem, his conception of eternity, of the absolute, of unity, and of truth.

It would perhaps be well at this point, before looking at any of the lines from "Atlantis" itself, to note a certain ambivalence in two of Crane's concepts. The first is whiteness. It has been noted how whiteness is associated in Crane's mind with cold, with sterility, with the frozen blankness of eternity in such poems as "North Labrador," "Recitative," and some of the "Voyages." But it has also been seen in "Possessions," and in "Faustus and Helen," how he thinks of a "white fire" as a cleansing agent, bringing purification. And now, in "Atlantis," he pictures the bridge, or Atlantis, as white--a bright, shining vision of whiteness. The second concept is eternity, and its ambivalence is closely associated with that of whiteness. It is evident that Crane pictures one kind of eternity and whiteness as dead, dull, blank and hopeless, and the other kind as bright, shimmering, alive--the eternity of living truth,

It is the second kind of whiteness which is constantly mentioned in "Atlantis;" it would be a false straining of the symbol to apply the first interpretation and speculate that even here the duality intrudes through the symbol of whiteness, and that for this reason Crane has not achieved in the poem his final unity or absolute--the transcendence of time and space. If he has not succeeded in doing so, the fault lies not in the concept of whiteness and eternity, but in the concept of Atlantis itself.

With all this in mind, it will be helpful to look at some of the lines of the poem. In the first lines the bridge is transformed into a harp:

Through the bound cable strands, the arching path  
Upward, veering with light, the flight of strings,--  
Taut miles of shuttling moonlight syncopate  
The whispered rush, telepathy of wires,

The vision is ever upward, and the bridge is spanning space:

And through that cordage, threading with its call  
One are synoptic of all tides below--  
Their labyrinthine mouths of history  
Pouring reply as though all ships at sea  
Complicated in one vibrant breath made cry,--  
"Make thy love sure--to weave whose song we ply!"  
--From black embankments, moveless soundings hailed,  
So seven oceans answer from their dream,

The Bridge, or the song, links not only the seven oceans and the ships that sail upon them, but also worlds, universes, stars:

Beyond whose frosted eaves the moon bequeaths  
Two worlds of sleep (O arching strands of song)--  
Onward and up the crystal-flooded aisle

White tempest nets file upward, upward ring  
 With silver terraces the humming spars,  
 The loft of vision, palladium helm of stars.

And it spans time, makes "Tommorrows into yesteryear":

. . . towering looms that press  
 Sidelong with flight of blade on tendon blade  
 --Tommorrows into yesteryear--and link  
 What cipher-script of time no traveller reads  
 But who, through smoking pyres of love and death,  
 Searches the timeless laugh of mythic spears.

Here the traveller, the poet, is searching through love and death for the timelessness, the eternity of his myth. And later, the Bridge and the poem ("multitudinous Verb") have succeeded in fusing the duality of the sun and the sea (overcoming the gulfs) into one vision, one song of Cathay:

From gulfs unfolding, terrible of drums,  
 Tall Vision-of-the-Voyage, tensely spare--  
 Bridge, lifting night to cycloramic crest  
 Of deepest day--O Choir, translating time  
 Into what multitudinous Verb the suns  
 And synergy of waters ever fuse, recast  
 In myriad syllables,--Psalm of Cathay!  
 O Love, thy white, pervasive Paradigm...!

The poet reaffirms his conquering of the sea; it is "kneeling," "yoked" by his song:

. . . yoking wave  
 To kneeling wave, one song devoutly binds--  
 The vernal strophe chimes from deathless strings!

Having conquered the sea, he has also conquered death:

Swift peal of secular light, intrinsic Myth  
 Whose fell unshadow is death's utter wound--

He has achieved a unity between the city and the country:

Sustained in tears the cities are endowed  
 And justified conelement with ripe fields  
 Revolving through their harvests in sweet torment.

And the vision is still ever upward:

Always through spitting cordage, pyramids  
 Of silver sequel, Deity's young name  
 Kinetic of white choiring wings..ascends.

Up to this point the mood has been positive, the vision real, the Bridge and its music strong as a symbol of the unity the poet has found. In the tenth stanza comes the first, and only, direct reference to Atlantis, and with it the first element of doubt, the first loss of assurance, the first evidence of clinging to the vision with desperation as opposed to the assured joyousness of the first stanzas:

Migrations that must needs void memory,  
 Inventions that cobblestone the heart,--  
 Unspeakable Thou Bridge to Thee, O Love.  
 Thy pardon for this history, whitest Flower,  
 O Answerer of all,--Anemone,--  
 Now while thy petals spend the suns about us, hold--  
 (O Thou whose radiance doth inherit me)  
 Atlantis,--hold thy floating singer late!

Another symbol, another objective, enters here--the flower of love. The entire stanza is peculiarly reminiscent of the mood of the "Voyages," which contain much love-flower-sea-death imagery. Recall the lines from "Voyages II":

Hasten, while they are true--sleep, death, desire,  
 Close round one instant in one floating flower.

This entire stanza suggests almost a rejection of the affirmation made in the earlier stanzas; after having overcome death, the poet now returns to imagery which is suggestive

of death in light of his earlier poetry. And especially with the interpolation of the Atlantis theme, with all that it has been found to include of dual meaning, does this stanza sound an ominous note. It is significant that the version of this poem which Crane sent to Waldo Frank on August 3, 1926, although close to the final version in most of its lines, was still entitled "Bridge" and did not include this tenth stanza.<sup>114</sup> The effect of the addition of this stanza is a weakening of the positive force of the entire poem, for love in Crane's earlier poems has been linked with death, and in the earlier stanzas of "Atlantis" Crane's object was to overcome both love and death to find eternity:

But who, through smoking pyres of love and death,  
Searches the timeless laugh of mythic spears.

Now, in the tenth stanza, the poet is no longer atop the bridge--he is floating in the sea, clinging to the ideal of Atlantis and begging it to hold him; but in actuality Atlantis had sunk back into the sea, as Crane realized, and if he clings to it, he too will sink into the sea--the death wish will be fulfilled. He already had the vision of this in "Cutty Sark," when he wrote of the sunken city:

Rose of Stamboul O coral Queen--  
teased remnants of the skeletons of cities--  
and galleries, galleries of waterguttled lava  
snarling stone--green--drums--drown--

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<sup>114</sup>. Weber, op. cit., Appendix C, "The Development of Atlantis," pp. 437-40.

The tenth stanza certainly weakens the following final stanza of "Atlantis," accentuating the question asked there:

So to thine Everpresence, beyond time,  
 Like spears ensanguined of one tolling star  
 That bleeds infinity--the orphic strings,  
 Sidereal phalanxes, leap and converge:  
 --One Song, one Bridge of Fire! Is it Cathay,  
 How pity steep the grass and rainbows ring  
 The serpent with the eagle in the leaves...?  
 Whispers antiphonal in azure swing.

The vision of Cathay is being questioned--the vision of America which Columbus had prophesied and which Crane had hoped to fulfil. And with it is being questioned the conquest of time and space; "rainbows"--a symbol of love--ring or surround the "serpent and the eagle." The last line does not answer the question; it is merely an answering musical whisper--a faint echo of the choiring melody of the early part of the poem.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

To the question, then, of whether Crane was successful in building a "bridge" between his alienation and a positive, unified society where beauty and materialism are fused into an absolute of wisdom and truth, the answer must be: only partially. In the early sections of The Bridge, and those which he wrote first, the vision is bright, the goal attainable--in "Ave Marie," "The River," "The Dance," and the first part of "Atlantis." But as Crane's faith in the future of America, and his faith in his myth and his inspiration in writing the poem began to flag, so did the conviction of the lines. In "Cape Hatteras," "Quaker Hill," and "The Tunnel," the picture is not that of man as master of the machine and modern civilization; man, or the poet, has not succeeded in fusing them into his great cultural traditions. Rather is man become subordinate to the civilization that he has built, and hence the hope of man is only in the death of that civilization, and in death on the personal level as well.

Crane was a poet of duality from the earliest poems he wrote. One side of his nature, and his poetry, was absorbed in warmth, life, friendship, contact with the world, and the symbols which represented those things for him. The other side was alienated--and prevented him from completely accept-



ing or trusting life, friendships, positivism. It left him somewhat apart--it was represented in his poetry in symbols of coldness, sterility, death. Crane recognized this duality in writing "Recitative;" he saw the two forces opposed there--the city and the country, the poet and his audience, commercialism and the human heart. He recognized it, too, in "Praise for an Urn," "Chaplinesque," and other poems in White Buildings. His first attempt to achieve a synthesis was in "Faustus and Helen," where he tried to find a place in modern society, through a catharsis of that society, for absolute beauty and poetic experience. He was too much a part of the modern world not to want to synthesize it with the classic concept of beauty in a positive way. But his experiences with the modern world--his personal disappointments and conflicts, were too bitter, and they pulled him toward the other side of his duality. He attempted to achieve a synthesis of death and love through the symbolism of the sea in the "Voyages"--alienating himself from contemporary civilization, going back to the ancient concepts of mystic, explosive death-in-love. But the synthesis with the sea and death seemed too final, too frightening to accept, and he turned once more to reconcile his dual nature with the modern world, this time a more determined attempt--The Bridge. But as he was writing it, the other side of his dual nature intruded, and symbolically he still felt the pull of the sea. In the end the attempt became desperate, but

futile; The Bridge is not a sustained symbol from "Proem" to "Atlantis," but breaks down in the middle sections and is questioned at the end.

So that of the two syntheses between which Crane wavered--the synthesis of the republic, of America, of the vast panorama of life, futurity, pantheism, symbolized by the bridge, and the synthesis of death, mysticism, sex, the past, symbolized by the sea--he finally lost his belief in the first. Even as he was writing The Bridge, the press of personal discouragement about the future of poetry, financial difficulties, spiritual depression, led him back to his original synthesis with the sea. Throughout such sections of The Bridge as "Cape Hatteras," "Quaker Hill," "Three Songs," and "The Tunnel," he employs, as has been seen, symbols which indicate a rejection of the city, the machine, American civilization, and a return to the sea, to sexual escape, to the dark fascination of death. Crane realized that he had not achieved synthesis in The Bridge; the poems which he wrote after The Bridge show a return to the mood of the "Voyages" and a growing preoccupation with death. There is in "O Carib Isle!" the image of the sun exploded in the sea; in one poem he wrote:

Enrich my resignation as I usurp those far  
 Points of control--hear the rifles blown out on the stag  
 Below the aeroplane--and see the fox's brush  
 Whisk silently beneath the red hill's earg,  
 Extinction stirred on either side  
 Because love wonders, keeps a certain mirth.--

Die, oh, centuries, die, as Dionysus said,  
 Yet live in all my resignation.  
 It is the moment, now, when all  
 The heartstrings spring, unlaced--  
 Here is the peace of the fathers.<sup>115</sup>

Even before Crane left for Mexico, to study and write on a Guggenheim fellowship, the mood of death was upon him; he wrote two months before he left for Mexico to Waldo Frank;

These are bewildering times for everyone, I suppose. I can't muster much of anything to say to anyone. I seem to have lost the faculty to even feel tension. A bad sign, I'm sure. When they all get it decided, Capitalism or Communism, then I'll probably be able to resume a few intensities; meanwhile there seems to be no sap in anything. I'd love to fight for--almost anything, but there seems to be no longer any real resistance. Maybe I'm only a disappointed romantic, after all. Or perhaps I've made too many affable compromises. I hope to discover the fault, whatever it is, before long . . . . Present day America seems a long way from the destiny I fancied when I wrote that poem [The Bridge]. In some ways Spengler must have been right.<sup>116</sup>

This mood he did not overcome; it prevailed during the time he was in Mexico, where he seemed to grow more absorbed in the idea of death. He wrote nothing of the projected poem of the Conquest he went there to write; the short poems he produced reflected his despair. He returned to the United States only once, for his father's funeral; the second return, pretending as it did an resumption of all the personal diffi-

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115. Hart Crane, "Enrich my Resignation," The Collected Poems of Hart Crane, p. 144.

116. Quoted by Philip Horton, Hart Crane; The Life of an American Poet, p. 278.

culties he had known before, he could not face. Partway back, the call of the sea became more than he could resist. The sun, shining brightly, was reflected in fire upon the waves at noon; the contesting forces of life could no longer hold him. He jumped.

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